



Spurgeon's Sermons Volume 25: 1879

by

Charles Spurgeon

About *Spurgeon's Sermons Volume 25: 1879* by Charles Spurgeon

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Prayer Perfumed with Praise

A Sermon

(No. 1469)

Delivered on Lord's-Day Morning, April 20th, 1879, by

C. H. SPURGEON,

At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

“In every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.”—Philippians 4:6.

ACCORDING TO THE TEXT, we are both by prayer and supplication to make known our requests unto God. If any distinction be intended here, I suppose that by prayer is meant the general act of devotion and the mention of our usual needs; and by supplication I think would be intended our distinct entreaties and special petitions. We are to offer the general prayer common to all the saints, and we are to add thereto the special and definite petitions which are peculiar to ourselves. We are to worship in prayer, for God is to be adored by all his saints, and then we are to beseech his favours for ourselves, according to the words of the text, letting our requests be made known unto God. Do not forget this second form of worship. There is a good deal of generalizing in prayer, and God forbid that we should say a word against it, so far as it is sincere worship, but we want to have more of specific, definite pleading with God, asking him for such-and-such things, with a clear knowledge of what we ask. You will hear prayers at prayer-meetings, in which everything is asked in general but nothing in particular, and yet the reality and heartiness of prayer will often be best manifested by the putting up of requests for distinct blessings. See how Abraham, when he went to worship the Lord, did not merely adore him, and in general pray for his glory, but on a special occasion he pleaded concerning the promised heir, at another time he cried, “O that Ishmael might live before thee,” and on one special occasion he interceded for Sodom. Elijah, when on the top of Carmel, did not pray for all the blessings of providence in general, but for rain, for rain there and then. He knew what he was driving at, kept to his point, and prevailed. So, my beloved friends, we have many wants which are so pressing as to be very distinct and definite, and we ought to have just so many clearly defined petitions which we offer unto God by way of supplication, and for the divine answers to these we are bound to watch with eager expectancy, so that when we receive them we may magnify the Lord.

The point to which I would draw your attention is this: that whether it be the general prayer or the specific supplication we are to offer either or both “*with thanksgiving.*” We are to pray about everything, and with every prayer we must blend our thanksgivings. Hence it follows that we ought always to be in a thankful condition of heart: since we are to pray without ceasing, and are not to pray without thanksgiving, it is clear that we ought to be always ready to give thanks unto the Lord. We must say with the Psalmist, “Thus will I bless thee while I live; I will lift up my hands in thy name.” The constant tenor and spirit of our lives should be adoring gratitude, love, reverence, and thanksgiving to the Most High.

This blending of thanks with devotion is always to be maintained. Always must we offer prayer and supplication *with* thanksgiving. No matter though the prayer should struggle upward out of the depths, yet must its wings be silvered o'er with thanksgiving. Though the prayer were offered upon

the verge of death, yet in the last few words which the trembling lips can utter there should be notes of gratitude as well as words of petition. The law saith: "With all thy sacrifices thou shalt offer salt;" and the gospel says with all thy prayers thou shalt offer praise. "One thing at a time" is said to be a wise proverb, but for once I must venture to contradict it, and say two things at a time are better, when the two are prayer and thanksgiving. These two holy streams flow from one common source, the Spirit of life which dwells within us; and they are utterances of the same holy fellowship with God; and therefore it is right that they should mingle as they flow, and find expression in the same holy exercise. Supplication and thanksgiving so naturally run into each other that it would be difficult to keep them separate: like kindred colours, they shade off into each other. Our very language seems to indicate this, for there is small difference between the words "to pray," and "to praise." A psalm may be either a prayer or praise, or both; and there is yet another form of utterance which is certainly prayer, but is used as praise, and is really both. I refer to that joyous Hebrew word which has been imported into all Christian languages, "Hosanna." Is it a prayer? Yes. "Save, Lord." Is it not praise? Yes; for it is tantamount to "God save the king," and is used to extol the Son of David. While we are here on earth we should never attempt to make such a distinction between prayer and praise that we should either praise without prayer or pray without praise; but with every prayer and supplication we should mingle thanksgiving, and thus make known our requests unto God.

This commingling of precious things is admirable. It reminds me of that verse in the Canticles where the king is described as coming up from the wilderness in his chariot, "like pillars of smoke, perfumed with myrrh and frankincense, with all powders of the merchant." There is the myrrh of prayer, and the frankincense of praise. So, too, the holy incense of the sanctuary yielded the smoke of prayer which filled the holy place, but with it there was the sweet perfume of choice spices, which may be compared to praise. Prayer and praise are like the two cherubim on the ark, they must never be separated. In the model of prayer which our Saviour has given us, saying, "After this manner pray ye," the opening part of it is rather praise than prayer—"Our Father which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name," and the closing part of it is praise, where we say, "For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen." David, who is the great tutor and exemplar of the church as to her worship, being at once her poet and her preacher, takes care in almost every psalm, though the petition may be agonizing, to mingle exquisite praise. Take for instance, that psalm of his after his great sin with Bathsheba. There one would think, with sighs and groans and tears so multiplied, he might have almost forgotten or have feared to offer thanksgiving while he was trembling under a sense of wrath; and yet ere the psalm that begins "Have mercy upon me, O God," can come to a conclusion the psalmist has said: "O Lord, open thou my lips, and my mouth shall show forth thy praise," and he cannot pen the last word without beseeching the Lord to build the walls of Jerusalem, adding the promise, "then shalt thou be pleased with the sacrifices of righteousness, with burnt offering and whole burnt offering: then shalt they offer bullocks upon thine alter." I need not stop to quote other instances, but it is almost always the case that David by the fire of prayer warms himself into praise. He begins low, with many a broken note of complaining, but he mounts and glows, and, like the lark, sings as he ascends. When at first his harp is muffled he warbles a few mournful notes and becomes excited, till he cannot restrain his hand from that well-known and accustomed string which he had reserved for the music of praise alone. There is a passage in the eighteenth Psalm, at the third verse, in which indeed he seems to have caught the very idea which I want to fix upon your minds this morning. "I will call upon the

Lord, who is worthy to be praised: so shall I be saved from mine enemies.” He was in such a condition that he says, “The sorrows of death compassed me, and the floods of ungodly men made me afraid. The sorrows of hell compassed me about: the snares of death prevented me.” Driven by distress, he declares that he will call upon the Lord, that is, with utterances of prayer; but he does not alone regard his God as the object of prayer, but as One who is to be praised. “I will call upon the Lord, who is worthy to be praised;” and then, as if inspired to inform us of the fact that the blending of thanksgiving with prayer renders it infallibly effectual, as I shall have to show you it does, he adds, “So shall I be saved from mine enemies.”

Now, if this habit of combining thanksgiving with prayer is found in the Old Testament saints, we have a right to expect it yet more in New Testament believers, who in clearer light perceive fresh reasons for thanksgiving; but I shall give you no instance except that of the writer of my text. Does he not tell us in the present chapter that those things which we have seen in him we are to do, for his life was agreeable with his teachings? Now, observe, how frequently he commences his epistles with a blending of supplication and thanksgiving. Turn to Romans 1:8-9, and note this fusion of these precious metals—“First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world. For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son, that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers.” There is “I thank my God,” and “I make mention of you always in my prayers.” This was not written with a special eye to the percept of our text; it was natural to Paul so to thank God when he prayed. Look at Colossians 1:3—“We give thanks to God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you.” To the same effect we read in First Thessalonians 1:2—“We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers.” Look also at Second Timothy 1:3—“I thank God, whom I serve from my forefathers with pure conscience, that without ceasing I have remembrance of thee in my prayers night and day.” And if it be so in other epistles, we are not at all surprised to find it so in Philippians 1:3-4—“I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all making request with joy.” Nor need I confine you to the language of Paul’s epistle, since it is most noteworthy that in Philippi itself (and those to whom he wrote must have remembered the incident) Paul and Silas prayed and sang praises unto God at midnight, so that the prisoners heard them. It is clear that Paul habitually practised what he here enjoins. His own prayers had not been offered without thanksgiving; what God hath joined together he had never put asunder.

With this as a preface, I invite you to consider, carefully and prayerfully, first, *the grounds of thanksgiving in prayer*; secondly, *the evil of its absence*; and thirdly, *the result of its presence*.

I. First, then, there are REASONS FOR MINGLING THANKSGIVING WITH PRAYER. In the nature of things it ought to be so. We have abundant cause, my brethen, for thanksgiving at all times. We do not come to God in Prayer as if he had left us absolutely penniless, and we cried to him like starving prisoners begging through prison bars. We do not ask as if we had never received a single farthing of God before, and hardly thought we should obtain anything now; but on the contrary, having been already the recipients of immense favours, we come to a God who abounds in lovingkindness, who is willing to bestow good gifts upon us, and waits to be gracious to us. We do not come to the Lord as slaves to an unfeeling tyrant craving for a boon, but as children who draw nigh to a loving father, expecting to receive abundantly from his liberal hands. Thanksgiving is the right spirit in which to come before the God who daily loadeth us with benefits. Bethink you for awhile what cause you have for thanksgiving in prayer.

And first you have this, that such a thing as prayer is possible, that a finite creature can speak with the infinite Creator, that a sinful being can have audience with the thrice-holy Jehovah. It is worthy of thanksgiving that God should have commanded prayer and encouraged us to draw near unto him; and that moreover he should have supplied all things necessary to the sacred exercise. He has set up a mercy seat, blood besprinkled; and he has prepared a High Priest, ever living to make intercession; and to these he has added the Holy Ghost to help our infirmities and to teach us what we should pray for as we ought. Everything is ready, and God waits for us to enquire at his hands. He has not only set before us an open door and invited us to enter, but he has given us the right spirit with which to approach. The grace of supplication is poured out upon us and wrought in us by the Holy Ghost. What a blessing it is that we do not attempt prayer with a peradventure, as if we were making a doubtful experiment, nor do we come before God as a forlorn hope, desperately afraid that he will not listen to our cry; but he has ordained prayer to be the ordinary commerce of heaven and earth, and sanctioned it in the most solemn manner. Prayer may climb to heaven, for God has himself prepared the ladder and set it down just by the head of his lonely Jacob, so that though that head be pillowed on a stone it may rest in peace. Lo, at the top of that ladder is the Lord himself in his covenant capacity, receiving our petitions and sending his attendant angels with answers to our requests. Shall we not bless God for this?

Let us praise his name, dear friends, also especially that you and I are still spared to pray and permitted to pray. What if we are greatly afflicted, yet it is of the Lord's mercy that we are not consumed. If we had received our desserts we should not now have been on praying ground and pleading terms with him. But let it be for our comfort and to God's praise that still we may stand with bowed head and cry each one—"God be merciful to me a sinner." Still may we cry like sinking Peter, "Lord save, or I perish." Like David, we may be unable to go up to the temple, but we can still go to our God in prayer. The prodigal has lost his substance, but he has not lost his power to supplicate. He has been feeding swine, but as yet he is still a man, and has not lost the faculty of desire and entreaty. He may have forgotten his father, but his father has not forgotten him; he may arise and he may go to him, and he may pour out his soul in his father's bosom. Therefore, let us give thanks unto God that he has nowhere said unto us—"Seek ye my face in vain." If we find a desire to pray trembling within our soul, and if though almost extinct we feel some hope in the promise of our gracious God, if our heart still groans after holiness and after God, though she hath lost her power to pray with joyful confidence as once she did, yet let us be thankful that we can pray even if it be but a little. In the will and power to pray there lies the capacity for infinite blessedness: he who hath the key of prayer can open heaven, yea, he hath access to the heart of God; therefore, bless God for prayer.

And then, beloved, beyond the fact of prayer and our power to exercise it, there is a further ground of thanksgiving that we have already received great mercy at God's hands. We are not coming to God to ask favours and receive them for the first time in our lives. Why, blessed be his name, if he never granted me another favour, I have enough for which to thank him as long as I have any being. And this, moreover, is to be recollected, that whatever great things we are about to ask, we cannot possibly be seeking for blessings one-half so great as those which we have already received if we are indeed his children. If thou art a Christian, thou hast life in Christ. Art thou about to ask for meat and raiment? The life is more than these. Thou hast already obtained Christ Jesus to be thine, and he that spared him not will deny thee nothing. Is there, I was about to say, anything to compare with the infinite riches which are already ours in Christ Jesus? Let us perpetually thank

our Benefactor for what we have while we make request for something more. Should it not be so? Shall not the abundant utterances of the memory of his great goodness run over into our requests, till our petitions are baptized in gratitude. While we come before God, in one aspect, empty handed to receive of his goodness, on the other hand we should never appear before him empty, but come with the fat of our sacrifices, offering praise and glorifying God.

Furthermore, there is this to be remembered, that when we come before God in the hour of trouble, remembering his great goodness to us in the past, and therefore thanking him, we ought to have faith enough to believe that the present trouble, about which we are praying, is sent in love. You will win with God in prayer if you can look at your trials in this light:—"Lord, I have this thorn in the flesh. I beseech thee, deliver me from it, but meanwhile I bless thee for it; for though I do not understand the why or the wherefore of it, I am persuaded there is love within it; therefore, while I ask thee to remove it, so far as it seemeth evil to me, yet wherein it may to thy better knowledge work my good, I bless thee for it, and I am content to endure it so long as thou seest fit." Is not that a sweet way of praying? "Lord, I am in want, be pleased to supply me; but, meanwhile, if thou do not, I believe it is better for me to be in need, and so I praise thee for my necessity while I ask thee to supply it. I glory in mine infirmity, even while I ask thee to overcome it. I triumph before thee in my affliction, and bless thee for it even while I ask thee to help me in it and to rescue me out of it." This is a royal way of praying: such an amalgam of prayer and thanksgiving is more precious than the gold of Ophir.

Furthermore, beloved, whenever we are on our knees in prayer, it becomes us to bless God that prayer has been answered so many times before. Here thy poor petitioner bends before thee to ask again, but ere he asks he thanks thee for having heard him so many times before. I know that thou hearest me always, therefore do I continue still to cry to thee. My thanksgivings urge me to make fresh petitions, encouraging me in the full confidence that thou wilt not send me away empty. Why, many of the mercies which you possess today, and rejoice in, are answers to prayer. They are dear to you because, like Samuel, whom his mother so named because he was "asked of God," they came to you as answers to your supplications. When mercies come in answer to prayer they have a double delight about them, not only because they are good in themselves, but because they are certificates of our favour with the Lord. Well, then, as God has heard us so often and we have the proofs of his hearing, should we ever pray with murmurings and complainings? Should we not rather feel an intense delight when we approach the throne of grace, a rapture awakened by sunny memories of the past?

Again, we ought to pray with thanksgiving in its highest of all senses, by thanking God that we have the mercy which we seek. I wish we could learn this high virtue of faith. When I was conversing lately with our dear friend George Miller, he frequently astonished me with the way in which he mentioned that he had for so many months and years asked for such and such a mercy, and praised the Lord for it. He praised the Lord for it as though he had actually obtained it. Even in praying for the conversion of a person, as soon as he had begun to intercede he began also to praise God for the conversion of that person. Though I think he told us he had in one instance already prayed for thirty years and the work was not yet done, yet all the while he had gone on thanking God, because he knew the prayer would be answered. He believed that he had his petition, and commenced to magnify the Giver of it. Is this unreasonable? How often do we antedate our gratitude among the sons of men! If you were to promise some poor person that you would pay his rent when it came due, he would thank you directly, though not a farthing had left your pocket. We have enough faith

in our fellow-men to thank them beforehand, and surely we may do the same with our Lord. Shall we not be willing to trust God for a few months ahead, ay, and for years beforehand, if his wisdom bids us wait. This is the way to win with him. When ye pray, believe that ye receive the boons ye ask, and ye shall have them. "Believe that ye have it," says the Scripture, "and ye shall have it." As a man's note of hand stands for the money, so let God's promise be accounted as the performance. Shall not heaven's bank-notes pass as cash? Yea, verily, they shall have unquestioned currency among believers. We will bless the Lord for giving us what we have sought, since our having it is a matter of absolute certainty. We shall never thank God by faith and then find that we were befooled. He has said, "All things whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive." And therefore we may rest assured that the thanksgiving of faith shall never bring shame into the face of the man who offers it.

Once again, and then I will say no more upon these grounds of thanksgiving; surely, brethren, if the Lord do not answer the prayer which we are offering, yet still he is so good, so supremely good, that we will bless him whether or no. We ought even to praise him when he does not answer us, ay, and bless him for refusing our desires. How devoutly might some of us thank him that he did not answer our prayers when we sought for evil things in the ignorance of our childish minds. We asked for flesh, and He might have sent us quails in His anger, and while the flesh was yet in our mouths his wrath might have come upon us; but in love he would not hear us. Blessed be his name for closing his ear in pity! Let us adore him when he keeps us waiting at his doors; thank him for rebuffs, and bless him for refusals, believing always that Ralph Erskine spoke the truth when he said:

"I'm heard when answered soon or late,
 Yea, heard when I no answer get:
 Yea, kindly answered when refused,
 And treated well when harshly used."

Faith glorifies the love of God, for she knows that the Lord's roughest usage is only love in disguise. We are not so sordid as to make our songs depend upon the weather, or on the fulness of the olive-press and the wine-fat. Blessed be his name, he must be right even when he seems at cross purposes with his people; we are not going to quarrel with him, like silly babes with their nurses, because he does not happen to grant us every desire of our foolish hearts. Though he slay us we will trust in him, much more if he decline our requests. We ask him for our daily bread, and if he withhold it we will praise him. Our praises are not suspended upon his answers to our prayers. If the labour of the olive should fail, and the field should yield no fruit; if the flock should be cut off from the fold, and the herd from the stall, yet still would we rejoice in the Lord, and joy in the God of our salvation. Blessed Spirit, raise us to this state of grace and keep us there.

Of that which we have spoken this is the sum: under every condition, and in every necessity, draw nigh to God in prayer, but always bring thanksgiving with you. As Joseph said to his brethren, "Ye shall not see my face, except your brother be with you;" so may the Lord say to you, "You shall not receive my smile unless you bring thankfulness with you." Let your prayers be like those ancient missals which one sometimes sees, in which the initial letters of the prayers are gilded and adorned with a profusion of colours, the work of cunning writers. Let even the general confession of sin and the litany of mournful petitions have at least one illuminated letter. Illuminate your prayers; light them up with rays of thanksgiving all the way through; and when you come together to pray forget not to make melody unto the Lord with psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs.

II. Secondly, I shall drive at the same point, while I try to show THE EVIL OF THE ABSENCE OF THANKSGIVING in our prayers.

First and foremost, we should be chargeable with ingratitude. Are we to be always receiving and never to return thanks? Aristotle rightly observes: "A return is required to preserve friendship between two persons," and as we have nothing else to give to God except gratitude, let us abound therein. If we have no fruit of the field, let us at least render to him the fruit of our lips. Have you no thanks to bring? How, then, can you expect further favours? Does not liberality itself close its hand when ingratitude stands in the way? What, never a word of gratitude to him from whom all blessings flow! Then may even the ungodly despise you.

Next, it would argue great selfishness if we did not combine praise with prayer. Can it be right to think only of ourselves, to pray for benefits and never honour our Benefactor? Are we going to import the detestable vice of avarice into spiritual things, and only care for our own souls' good? What, no thought for God's glory! No idea of magnifying his great and blessed name! God forbid that we should fall into a spirit so mean and narrow. Healthy praise and thanksgiving must be cultivated, because they prevent prayer from becoming overgrown with the mildew of selfishness.

Thanksgiving also prevents prayer from becoming an exhibition of the want of faith; for indeed some prayer is rather a manifestation of the absence of faith than the exercise of confidence in God. If when I am in trouble I still bless the Lord for all I suffer, therein my faith is seen. If before I obtain the mercy, I thank God for the grace which I have not yet tasted, therein my faith is manifest. What, is our faith such that it only sings in the sunshine? Have we no nightingale music for our God? Is our trust like the swallow, which must leave us in winter? Is our faith a flower which needs the conservatory to keep it alive? Can it not blossom like the gentian at the foot of the frozen glacier, where the damp and chill of adversity surround it? I trust it can, it ought to do so, and we ought to feel that we can praise and bless God when outward circumstances appear rather to demand sighs than songs.

Not to thank God in our prayers *would argue willfulness, and want of submission to his will.* Must everything be ordered according to our mind? To refuse to praise unless we have our own way is great presumption, and shows that like a naughty child we will sulk if we cannot be master. I might illustrate the willfulness of many a supplication by that of a little boy who was very diligent in saying his prayers, but was at the same time disobedient, ill-tempered, and the pest of the house. His mother told him that she thought it was mere hypocrisy for him to pretend to pray. He replied, "No, mother, indeed it is not, for I pray God to lead you and father to like my ways better than you do." Numbers of people want the Lord to like their ways better, but they do not intend to follow the ways of the Lord. Their minds are contrary to God and will not submit to his will, and therefore there is no thanksgiving in them. Praise in a prayer is indicative of an humble, submissive, obedient spirit, and when it is absent we may suspect willfulness and self-seeking. Very much of the prayer of rebellious hearts is the mere growling of an angry obstinacy, the whine of an ungratified self-conceit. God must do this and he must do that, or else we will not love him. What baby talk! What spoiled children such are! A little whipping will do them good. "I have never believed in the goodness of God," said one, "ever since he took my dear mother away." I knew a good man whose child was on the verge of the grave; when I went to see her he charged me not to mention death to her, for he said, "I do not believe God could do such an unkind action as take my only child away." When I assured him that she would surely die in a few days, and that he must not quarrel with the will of the Lord, he stood firm in his rebellion. He prayed, but he could not bless God, and it was

no marvel that his heart sank within him, and he refused to be comforted, when at last his child died, as we all felt sure she would. He became afterwards resigned, but his want of acquiescence cost him many a smart. This will not do; this quarreling with God is poor work! Resignation comes to the heart like an angel unawares, and when we entertain it our soul is comforted. We may ask for the child's life, but we must also thank the Lord that the dear life has been prolonged so long as it has been, and we must put the child and everything else into our Father's hands and say, "If thou shouldest take all away, yet still will I bless thy name, O thou Most High." This is acceptable prayer, because it is not soured by the leaven of self-will, but salted with thankfulness.

We must mingle our thanksgivings with our prayers, or else we may fear that our mind is not in harmony with the divine will. Recollect, dear friends, that prayer does not alter the mind of God: it never was the intent of prayer that it should attempt anything of the kind. Prayer is the shadow of the decrees of the Eternal. God has willed such a thing, and he makes his saints to will it, and express their will in prayer. Prayer is the rustling of the wings of the angels who are bringing the blessing to us. It is written, "Delight thyself also in the Lord; and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart." It is not said that he will give the desire of his heart to every Jack and Tom; but you must first delight in the Lord, and when your mind finds all her joy in God then it is clear that God and you, as far as it can be, are standing on the same plane and moving in the same direction, and now you shall have the desire of your heart because the desire of your heart is the desire of God's heart. Character, as much as faith, lies at the basis of prevalence in prayer. I do not mean in the case of the prayer of the sinner when he is seeking mercy, but I mean in the habitual prayers of the godly. There are some men who cannot pray so as to prevail, for sin has made them weak, and God walks contrary to them because they walk contrary to him. He who has lost the light of God's countenance has also lost much of the prevalence of his prayers. You do not suppose that every Israelite could have gone to the top of Carmel and opened the windows of heaven as Elijah did. No, he must first be Elijah, for it is the effectual, fervent prayer, not of every man, but of a righteous man, that availeth much; and when the Lord has put your heart and my heart into an agreement with him then we shall pray and prevail. What did our Lord say—"If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you." Doubtless many lose power in prayer because their lives are greivous in the sight of the Lord, and he cannot smile upon them. Will any father listen to the requests of a child who has set himself up in opposition to parental authority? The obedient, tender, loving child, who would not wish for anything which you did not think right to give, is he whose requests you are pleased to consider and fulfil; yea, more, you even anticipate the wishes of such a child, and before he calls you answer him. May we be such children of the great God.

III. And now, in the third place, let us consider **THE RESULT OF THE PRESENCE OF THIS THANKSGIVING IN CONNECTION WITH PRAYER.** According to the context, the presence of thanksgiving in the heart together with prayer is productive of peace. "In everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God, and the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus." Now that peace, that conscious calm, that divine serenity, which is described as the peace of God, is not produced by prayer alone, but by prayer with thanksgiving. Some men pray, and therein they do well; but for lack of mixing thanksgiving with it their prayer agitates them, and they come away from the closet even more anxious than when they entered it. If they mingled in their petitions that sweet powder of the merchants, which is called praise, and mixed it after the art of the apothecary,

in due proportions, the blessing of God would come with it, causing repose of heart. If we bless our gracious Lord for the very trouble we pray against; if we bless him for the very mercy which we need, as though it had already come; if we resolve to praise him whether we receive the boon or not, learning in whatsoever state we are therewith to be content, then “the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds by Christ Jesus.” Brethren, as you value this divine rest of spirit, as you prize constant serenity of soul, I beseech you, mingle praises with your prayers.

The next effect of it will be this: the thanksgiving will often warm the soul, and enable it to pray. I believe it is the experience of many who love secret devotion that at times they cannot pray, for their heart seems hard, cold, dumb, and almost dead. Do not pump up unwilling and formal prayer, my brethren; but take down the hymn-book and sing. While you praise the Lord for what you have, you will find your rocky heart begin to dissolve and flow in rivers. You will be encouraged to plead with the Lord because you will remember what you have aforesaid received at his hand. If you had an empty wagon to raise to the mouth of a coal-pit, it might be a very difficult task for you; but the work is managed easily by the common-sense of the miners. They make the full wagons, as they run down, pull the empty wagons up the incline. Now, when your heart is loaded with praise for mercy received, let it run down the incline, and draw up the empty wagon of your desires, and you will thus find it easy to pray. Cold and chill prayers are always to be deplored, and if by so simple a method as entreating the Lord to accept our thanksgiving our hearts can be warmed and renewed, let us by all means take care to use it.

Lastly, I believe that when a man begins to pray with thanksgiving he is upon the eve of receiving the blessing. God’s time to bless you has come when you begin to praise him as well as pray to him. God has his set time to favour us, and he will not grant us our desire until the due season has arrived. But the time has come when you begin to bless the Lord. Now, take an instance of this in Second Chronicles 20:20—Jehoshaphat went out to fight with an exceeding great army, and mark how he achieved the victory. “They rose early in the morning and went forth into the wilderness of Tekoa: and as they went forth, Jehoshaphat stood and said, Hear me, O Judah, and ye inhabitants of Jerusalem; believe in the LORD your God, so shall ye be established; believe his prophets, so shall ye prosper. And when he had consulted with the people he appointed”—what? warriors, captains? No, that was all done, but he “appointed singers unto the LORD, and that should praise the beauty of holiness, as they went out before the army, and to say, Praise the LORD; for his mercy endureth for ever. And when they began to sing and to praise, the LORD set ambushments against the children of Ammon, Moab, and mount Seir, which were come against Judah; and they were smitten.” Victory came when they began to sing and praise. You shall get your answers to prayer when you multiply your thanksgivings in all your prayers and supplications: rest you sure of that.

Our thanksgiving will show that the reason for our waiting is now exhausted; that the waiting has answered its purpose, and may now come to a joyful end. Sometimes we are not in a fit state to receive a blessing, but when we reach the condition of thankfulness, then is the time when it is safe for God to indulge us. A professing Christian came to his minister once and said, “Sir, you say we should always pray.” “Yes, my friend, undoubtedly.” “But then, Sir, I have been praying for twelve months that I might enjoy the comforts of religion, and I am no happier than before. I have made that my one perpetual prayer, that I might enjoy the comforts of religion, and I do not feel joy nor even peace of mind; in fact, I have more doubts and fears than ever I had.” “Yes,” said his minister, “and that is the natural result of such a selfish prayer. Why, dear friend,” he said,

“come and kneel down with me, and let us pray in another manner, ‘Father, glorify thy name! Thy kingdom come.’ Now,” said he, “go and offer those petitions and get to work to try to make it true, and see if you do not soon enjoy the comforts of religion.” There is a great deal in that fact: if you will but desire God to be glorified, and aim at glorifying him yourself, then shall the joys of true godliness come to you in answer to prayer.

The time for the blessing is when you begin to praise God for it. For, brethren, you may be sure that when you put up a thanksgiving on the ground that God has answered your prayer, you really have prevailed with God. Suppose you had promised to some poor woman that you would give her a meal tomorrow. You might forget it, you know; but suppose when the morning came she sent her little girl with a basket for it, she would be likely to get it I think. But, suppose that she sent in addition a little note in which the poor soul thanked you for your great kindness, could you have the heart to say, “My dear girl, I cannot attend to you today. Come another time”? Oh dear no, if the cupboard was bare you would send out to get something, because the good soul so believed in you that she had sent you thanks for it before she received your gift. Well, now, trust the Lord in the same manner. He cannot run back from his Word, my brethren. Believing prayer holds him, but believing thanksgiving binds him. If it is not in your own heart, though you be evil, to refuse to give what you have promised when that promise is so believed that the person rejoices as though he had it; then depend upon it the good God will not find it in his heart to refuse. The time for reception is fully come because thanksgiving for that reception fills your heart. I leave the matter with you. If you are enabled to pray in that fashion, great good will come to yourselves, and to the church of God, and to the world at large by such prayers.

Now, I think I hear in this audience somebody saying, “But I cannot pray so. I do not know how to pray. Oh, that I knew how to pray! I am a poor, guilty sinner. I cannot mix any thanksgiving with my supplications.” Ah, my dear soul, do not think about that just now. I am not so much preaching to you as I am preaching to the people of God. For you it is quite enough to say—“God be merciful to me a sinner.” And yet I will venture to say that there is praise in such a petition. You are implicitly praising the justice of God, and you are praising his mercy by appealing to him. When the prodigal returned, and he began his prayer by saying, “I am not worthy to be called thy son,” there was in that confession a real praise of the father’s goodness, of which he was unworthy to partake. But you need not to think about this matter at present, for first you have to find Jesus, and eternal life in him. Go and plead the merit of Jesus, and cast yourself upon the love and mercy of God in him and he will not cast you away: and then another day, when you thus have found and known him, take care that the thanksgiving for your salvation never ceases. Even when you are most hungry, and poor, and needy in the future continue to bless your saving Lord, and say, “This poor man cried, and the LORD heard him: and because the LORD inclined his ear unto me I will praise his name as long as I live.”

God bless you, for Jesus’ sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Philippians 4.

HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK.”—18 (Vers. 1.), 1001, 982.

Constant, Instant, Expectant

A Sermon

(No. 1480)

Delivered on Lord's-Day Morning, June 22nd, 1879, by

C. H. SPURGEON,

At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

“Continuing instant in prayer.”—Romans 12:12.

THIS is placed in connection with a large number of brief but very weighty precepts. Prayer has a distinct relationship to all Christian duties and graces. It is not possible for us to carry out the holy commands of our Lord Jesus unless we are abundant in supplication. The Romans at the time that Paul wrote to them were subject to persecution, and in this verse he mentions two remedies for impatience under such afflictions, remedies which are equally effectual under all the trials of life. The old physicians tell us of two antidotes against poison, the hot and the cold, and they dilate upon the special excellence of each of these: in like manner the apostle Paul gives us first the warm antidote—“Rejoicing in hope,” and then he gives us the cool antidote, “Patient in tribulation.” Either of these, or both together, will work wonderfully for the sustaining of the spirit in the hour of affliction; but it is to be observed, that neither of these remedies can be taken into the soul except they be mixed with a draught of prayer. Joy and patience are curative essences, but they must be dropped into a glass full of supplication, and then they will be wonderfully efficient. How can we “rejoice in hope” if we know nothing about prayer to the God of hope. Whenever your hope seems to fail you and your joy begins to sink,—the shortest method is to take to your knees. By remembering the promise in prayer hope will be sustained, and then joy is sure to spring from it, for joy is the first-born child of hope. As for “patience,” how can we be patient if we cannot pray? Have not holy men of old always sustained themselves in their worst times of grief and depression by betaking themselves to prayer? Mind that you do the same. Impatience will be sure to follow prayerlessness, but the endurance of the divine will grows out of communion with God in prayer. I like that beautiful, though sad, picture of the Norwich martyr, Hudson, of whom Foxe tells us that, when he stood at the stake with the chain about him to be burnt, he fell under a cloud. The Lord had withdrawn the light of his countenance from him, and therefore this man of God slipped from under the chain to have a few minutes alone with God. Some thought that he was about to recant, and his fellow martyrs began exhorting him to be steadfast and to play the man, but this dear believer knew what he was at, and when he had spoken with his God he came back to the stake with a bright and beaming countenance, saying, “Now, I thank God, I am strong, and fear not what man can do unto me,” and stood in his place with his fellow sufferers and there burned quick to the death without fear. Oh the power of prayer! If we do but know how to get in contact with the Eternal and Omnipotent, we shall be joyful and patient in all tribulations, and bravely endure even the keen edge of death.

Prayer is to be exercised in all things, for from its position in the present context we are taught that it is not without prayer that we proceed to “distribute to the necessities of the saints.” Because we have prayed for them we are ready to befriend them by deeds of love. If we have not been accustomed to pray for the brethren, we shall not be “given to hospitality”; much less shall we

“bless them which persecute us.” prayer is the life-blood of duty, the secret sap of holiness, the fountain of obedience. Upon prayer as spoken of in the text may the Holy Spirit help us now to meditate.

Three things I shall speak upon which will be remembered the better by being linked with three words—*Instant, constant, expectant*.

I. First, then, Instant—“*Continuing instant in prayer.*” It may be proper at this stage to say that these words, though I shall dwell upon them in the English, are not identical with the Greek, in which there is but one word. I do not know that a better translation could possibly be given, and so I shall content myself with the very words of our own version. The word “instant,” as used by our translators, meant pressing, urgent, importunate, earnest. The Greek word is said to have the signification of “always applying strength in prayer,” or continuing with all your might in prayer. Our prayer is to be full of strength; “blessed is the man whose strength is in thee.” Master Brooks saith that the word is a metaphor taken from hunting dogs, which will never give up the game till they have got it. A hunting dog when in pursuit of its victim works itself into full motion, using every limb and muscle to follow as fast as possible. If you catch a glimpse of it you will see that it throws itself forward with intense eagerness, the whole body and soul of the dog is in motion towards one object; no portion of him lingers, not so much as a glance is given to anything else, the whole creature is instant after the game which it pursues, urgently pressing, hot foot, as we say, to overtake the prey. Now, this is the way in which we are to pray. Prayer as a mere form is but a mockery; prayer in a languid, half-hearted manner may be more dishonouring to God than honouring to him; we ourselves may be rather injured by lukewarm prayer than benefited by it. Prevalent prayer is frequently spoken of in Scripture as an agony—“striving together with me in your prayers.” We frequently speak of it as “wrestling,” and we do well, for so it is. In wrestling a man hath all his mind as well as all his body occupied with the desire to overthrow his antagonist. Now he bends and twists, and anon he strains and stretches: now he uses one foot and then another; he tries his arm and stretches: now he uses one foot and then another; he tries his arm and now his leg; he shifts his ground, he shifts his ground, he takes up another position, and he keeps his eye perpetually open lest he should be caught unawares. He hath both his hands eager for a grip, his whole body ready for a throw: the whole man is in his wrestling. After such a manner pray ye; the whole of your mind, your memory, your judgement, your affection, your hopes, your fears, and even your imagination must be concentrated upon this labour of prayer. May the Holy Ghost work in you this comprehensive ardour, this energy of the whole man. We must go with our whole soul to God or he will not accept us. It will be ill for us if we are half-hearted, for it is written, “their heart is divided; now shall they be found faulty.” “The Kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force.” We are exhorted to “knock,” and as our model we are directed to him who at midnight aroused his slumbering friend. We are exhorted to be importunate, like the widow with the unjust judge. We are to pray as if all depended upon our praying; though after all that praying is in itself an affect of a cause which has existed long before. We are to be as importunate as if God were unwilling, and to plead as earnestly as if he did not already know far better than we do what things we have need of. Earnestness must be present in all our prayers or they will return to us unanswered: this is reasonable enough. Shall God be expected to give to us that which we do not value? If we do not value the blessing sufficiently to be eager in seeking it, is it not right that he should withhold it until we are in a better mind? Are we to worship God with a divided reverence? Are we to treat him as though it were quite enough for him if we gave him a stray thought, or a

half-hearted desire, now and then, as a sort of compliment? Can we expect that he will receive our sacrifice if we lay no fire under it? If we have no impetuous earnestness of spirit, can we expect that we shall be accepted? He loathes the lukewarm, will he not loath our prayers? See how we deal with our fellow men; if they ask a favour of us and we see that they care but little about it, we are in no great haste to put ourselves about to do them the turn, but if they are very pressing, we yield to their entreaties; and so doth God in his mercy yield to their entreaties of his people. As one hath very prettily said, the nurse when she hath her child in the cradle, though it beginneth to cry and whinny a little, she leaves it and continueth at her household work, and when it cries a little more, and a little more she still hearkens, but she lets it be where it is. But when at last the babe takes to vehement crying, then straightway she presses it to her bosom with many a kiss and a kindly word. Children of God, you must cry mightily unto the Lord, and pour out your hearts like water before him, and then will he have regard unto the voice of your cry, and it shall be unto you even according to your desire. Instancy in prayer is needful; we must be fervent or burning, or we shall not prevail.

How are we to attain to this urgency? God's gracious Spirit must give it to us, but what are the methods by which, under his direction, we may become instant in prayer?

I answer first, *let us study very thoroughly the value of the mercy which we are seeking at God's hand.* Seeker, take heed to this.

Whatever it is that thou are asking for, it is nor trifle. Look at it. If it be a thing about which thou art not certain that it would be according to God's mind, lay it aside: thou hast no right to be very fervent about that which is of questionable necessity. If this may or may not be good for thee, put up thy requests to the great Father gently once or twice, and then lay them lightly in Jesus' hand. But when thou art certain that the blessing sought for is a good and necessary thing for thy soul, then in order that thy spirit may be strong in prayer get a deep sense of it's value, its goodness, and its necessity; examine it as a goldsmith inspects a jewel when he wishes to estimate its worth. A man's ardour in pursuit will be in proportion to his consciousness of the value of that which he pursues. Get thou to feel what a precious thing grace is, what it cost the Lord to bring it to thee; what blessings it brings with it for time and for eternity, and when thy heart sees that it seeks after an unspeakably precious gift, then will its desire be stirred up to pray with intense longings.

When thou hast done this, meditate much upon thy necessities that thou mayest *get a sense of thy need of the mercy thou art seeking.* See thy soul's poverty and thine own undeservingness. Look at what will happen to thee unless this blessing come. If it be some absolutely indispensable spiritual blessing, picture to thyself where thou wilt be if God should withhold it, what evils will spring of thy continuing in want of it, and what further wants may yet beset thee. The more thy need smites thee the more eagerly wilt thou cry unto the Lord concerning it. Art thou desirous of bread for thy soul, be hungry, and let thine hunger eat into thy heart. Art thou desirous of the water of life; be thirsty, and let thy thirst burn thee till thou art dried up like a potsherd. Let thy necessities have liberty, by meditation, to seize thee and to distress thee with a sense of thine emptiness and nothingness. Nothing sets a man more eagerly upon prayer than a deep sense of his need of that which he is seeking at the Lord's hand. He will eagerly seek for garments who shivers in his nakedness amid the winter's blast. He will earnestly long for home who feels himself lost upon a moor in the midst of a midnight fog. Get thou a consciousness of where and what thou art apart from Christ and from the mercy of God, and then, when thou perceivest well thy need, this, with a sense of the greatness of the blessing, will much quicken thee as to instancy in prayer.

Endeavour also to *get a distinct consciousness of the fact that God must give thee this blessing, or thou wilt never have it*. It requires time to think over these things, therefore set thyself apart awhile from all other occupations, and think on these matters. Say to thyself—Here is such and such a spiritual mercy, and I can never get it out of myself, for I am a dry well. Nothing can come out of nothing, and I am nothing. I cannot bring a clean thing out of an unclean, and I am unclean. This spiritual blessing I cannot obtain from my fellow-man; nor king nor priest could bring it to me. I cannot climb to heaven after it, nor dive into the abyss to find it; nor earth nor heaven can yield it, nor can either time or eternity produce it. God alone must give it to me, and he is a sovereign, he has a right to give or to withhold. I cannot claim it of him as a matter of right, he must give it to me of his mere mercy, it must be a boon of undeserved favour. Oh, if you get that truth well wrought into your soul you will pray earnestly, and you will use the right arguments,—“Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness, according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies.” God alone can help you, and if he refuse you are undone for ever, therefore cry mightily unto him.

Further to make you instant in prayer *endeavour eagerly to desire the good thing*. Stand not before God if thou wouldst win at his hands, as one who will be content whether or no. Say not “Give it or withhold it, it is all one to me. I knock at thy door, and if thou open I will be somewhat pleased, but if thy door be shut I will be pleased too.” Oh no; such listlessness will never prevail with God. There are times when you must be brought to this condition that you will not be denied. There is a holy “impudency,” as the Puritans were wont to call it, to which we must be brought, in which we shall with holy boldness dare to say like Jacob, “I will not let thee go, except thou bless me.” Such language would be blasphemy if it were not permitted, it would be presumption if it were not encouraged; but there is little fear of our being too bold, for in these times men are more inclined to keep at a distance than to come too near. We are permitted to use the liberty of obedient, loving children. We are allowed in the holy confidence of faith to resolve that we will seek until we find, we will ask until we receive, we will knock until the door is opened unto us. Our case is urgent, and we must needs press it till our suit is gained. Never was a man brought to such a pass by the grace of God but what speedily the Lord was pleased to open the hand of his liberality and give him according to his desire; but this vehemence must be manifested. A certain person is mentioned in John Bunyan’s “Holy War,” whose name is Mr. Desiresawake, and their prayers lie dormant like certain wild beasts in winter; fain would I stir them out of their dens. Wake up, man, wake up when you pray, for it is insulting to God to give him sleepy worship. Dreaming at praying and playing at praying, as some do, are grievous sins. No, no, prayer must be heart work, soul-work, spirit work. Prayer ought to be the sweat of the soul, it should sometimes be even as the bloody sweat of an agonizing heart, crying mightily unto the Lord, as Jesus did in the garden. To such the Lord sendeth down his angel to strengthen them or in some way heareth their pleadings in that concerning which they were filled with anguish. Intensity of desire must be exhibited or else it may come to pass that the time of the bestowal is not yet come.

I will suppose, dear brother, that you have followed these directions so far by the help of God’s Spirit, and now you know your need of the mercy, and something of the value of it; you see that God alone can give it you, and you are anxiously desirous to have it. Now comes the tug of war; you are to *plead with all your might*. Gather up all your faculties to see whether this thing be a matter of promise or no. Take down the Book, your charter and your Father’s will, and see if there be any part of the charter which promises this good thing to you. When you have found the promise

lay your finger on it. Better still, with your spirit grasp it in your hand, and go before God with it. If your prayer be as Luther calls it, "*bombarda Christianorum*," the Christian's great gun with which he doth bombard heaven, then surely the promise is the shot which he sends forth. Plead the promise by saying, "Lord, do as thou hast said. Fulfil this word unto thy servant upon which thou hast caused me to hope." If you do not seem to prevail with one promise seek out another and plead it. This, perhaps will be more to the point,—a promise which your very soul seems to suck in as though it were spoken to you newly and freshly, as if never another man had ever received it. Spread this second promise before the Lord. Nothing pleases him more than seeing his own word pleaded by his own children. Try this, and if it is manifest that you have not succeeded turn to yet another promise, and another and another and another, and then plead, "For thy name's sake, for thy truth's sake, for thy covenant's sake"; and then came in with the greatest plea of all, "For Jesus' sake and in his name, for the blood's sake, I plead with thee, my God. O thou that hearest prayer, wilt thou not keep touch with thine own word, and be true to thine own Son?" You have prevailed there. By that sign you have conquered. Again it shall be seen that the Lord hath hearkened to the voice of a man.

Still there is one thing more wanted, and that is *strong faith*, not only that God is, but that he is the rewarder of them that diligently seek him. You cannot be instant in prayer, nay, you cannot offer an acceptable prayer at all except as you believe in the prayer-hearing God. The modern wise men assure us, with a patronizing air, that prayer is a pious exercise, exceedingly beneficial to ourselves, but quite inoperative with God. They are kind enough to allow us to pray, only we must not suppose that it has the slightest effect. And do they think that we are such idiots that we would stand and whistle to the wind and find good for our souls in such a stupid proceeding? They must have formed their notion of our mental condition from their own if they imagine that we should pray if we knew that God did not hear us, and would not answer us. Prayer apart from the idea of a hearing God is not praying; it is soliloquizing, or, in plainer words, a silly talking to yourself, such as one sees in half-witted old persons who have outlived what few senses they once possessed. You must believe that God is, and that your pleadings are a part of the divine way of blessing you, or else you are not praying but maundering and chattering. The Lord does really listen to the pleadings of his people, and though he does not alter his ordinance and his decree, yet in some way or other he makes the prayers of his people to be an efficient link in the machinery of his providence and grace, so that not without prayer doth he bless them, but with it he doth bless them abundantly. Dear friends, may the Lord the Holy Spirit stir us all up to be instant in mighty, energetic prayer.

II. Now, secondly, comes the CONSTANT—"*continuing* instant in prayer." To go back to the hunting dog with which we set out. We saw him rushing like the wind after his game, but this will not be enough if it only lasts for a little; he must continue running if he is to catch his prey. It matters not how fast the stag-hound goes if after having kept the pace awhile he begins to slacken—the stag will escape from him. It is a sign of failure in the iron trade when the furnaces are blown out; when business flourishes the fire blazes both day and night; and so will it be with prayer when the soul is in a flourishing state. If prayer be the Christian's vital breath, how can he leave off praying?

We must maintain the ardour of prayer; we must be intense always. Prayer is not to be a thing of yesterday, but of to-day, and to-morrow, until it changeth into praise above. Perhaps prayer will continue even in heaven. Certainly the souls under the alter cry "How long?" and unfulfilled prophecies yet big with future events will be pleaded even there. Praise, however, is the chief characteristic of the future state, as prayer is the characteristic of the present one. We are to get into

a good pace—"instant in prayer," and then to keep it up—*continuing* instant in prayer. "That is difficult" says one. Who said it was not? All the processes of the Christian life are difficult; indeed, they are impossible apart from the abiding help of the divine Spirit: but "the Spirit helpeth our infirmities." Now then, brethren, that we may be helped to keep up our fervency in prayer, please to notice that prayer must be continuous, because *it is so singularly mixed with the whole gospel dispensation*. As the incense filled the temple, so does prayer fill the gospel economy. The blood was upon the mercy seat, and upon the altar, and the laver, and the candlestick, and the book; it was sprinkled everywhere in the Jewish Tabernacle, and thus atonement was the most conspicuous object in the worship prescribed by the law of Moses; but next to this, prayer was most prominent in the continual calling upon God, and in the smoke of the incense by which prayer was symbolized. It is the high privilege of those who are believers in Jesus to draw nigh unto God with their petitions perpetually. The whole church, like the twelve tribes, is instantly serving God day and night in prayer, hoping for the fulfillment of the promise of the glorious appearing. "Behold, he prayeth" is the very mark of the individual Christian, and the unity, the life, and the spirituality of the church are best seen in prayer.

"Nor prayer is made on earth alone;
The Holy Spirit pleads;
And Jesus, on the eternal throne,
For sinners intercedes."

Prayer was dear to Jesus when he was the Man of Nazareth upon the mountain's lonely side; and prayer is dear to him now that as the Son of God he intercedes in glory. Even to him the covenant hath this condition of prayer appended, "Ask of me, and I will give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession." Prayer is the atmosphere which surrounds Emanuel's land: as the clouds hang on the mountains, so doth prayer linger over every great mercy of God.

Prayer is connected with every covenant blessing. Why, beloved, it is to him that calleth upon the name of the Lord that the promise of salvation is given. Our heavenly Father gives the Holy Spirit to those that ask him. Justification was given to the publican rather than to the Pharisee, because he had offered humble, believing, acceptable prayer; whereas the Pharisee asked nothing, but only glorified himself. Adoption begets prayer, for it brings us the spirit of adoption whereby we cry, Abba, Father. From election right onward to perfection in Christ there is no blessing of the covenant but what is understood, received, enjoyed, fed upon, and practically used in the way of prayer. Those who would safely navigate the sea of life must pray their passage to heaven.

Moreover, beloved, *prayer has been connected with every living spiritual experience you have ever had*. Will you kindly look back to the hour when you were under the fig tree and Jesus saw you. Were you not at prayer? When you first arose to go to your Father, was not you first step a prayer? When you received the assurance of salvation, was it not in answer to prayer? When his banner over you has been love, have you not felt it sweet to pray? When you have feasted at his table, and he has revealed himself to you as he does not to the world, have you not then been in the spirit of prayer? The hill Mizar and the Hermonites—places you never can forget, those choicest of spots, which seem as you look back along the vista of life to be gleaming with a supernatural splendour—has not prayer been connected with them all? There has been nothing grandly great or good in your spiritual life, but Jabbok has flowed near it, and the top of Carmel has been near to view, where you have wrestled with God and have prevailed.

Now, beloved, we are commanded to be constant in our instancy. Is not this right? Is *there any time when we can afford to slacken prayer?* Would you kindly put your finger on the map of the way, and tell me where a Christian man may leave off praying? Is it when he prospers? No, for then he needs grace to carry a full cup with a steady hand. Is it when he is in distress? Doth not nature itself teach us that in time of affliction we should especially draw near to God in prayer? When should he pray, nay, when should he not pray? Where may he pray? The answer is, he may pray everywhere, for as one has well said, a man who carries his temple about with him is always in a place where he may pray ; and know ye not that your bodies are the temples of the Holy Ghost? Wherever you go you carry your temples with you, and therefore be sure that you do pray. If you are on the housetop with Peter pray there, and if waiting at table with Nehemiah, pray there: if in the field with Isaac or on the mountain with the Lord, or in the sea with Jonah, or in a prison with Joseph, or in the article of death with Stephen, pray there.

“Long as they live should Christians pray,
For only while they pray they live.”

When they are under the wings of the cherubim crying unto God at his mercy seat then are they in the secret place of the tabernacle of the Most High, and then shall they abide under the shadow of the Almighty.

But specially we ought to be constant in prayer, because *such remarkable gifts are vouchsafed to importunity*. God often gives liberally to prayer when it speaks but once, but frequent pleading begets abundant answering. That is the most soul-enriching prayer which is long in winning its way with God. When prayers like great ships have been long on the voyage you may hope that they have gone far and have gathered rich cargoes and will come home freighted with all the goodlier merchandise. If you can but quietly hope, and patiently wait, all will be well. The very choicest blessings of heaven are reserved for the Elijahs who can say, “Go again seven times,” for the men who come again and again and again and never faint. Wait then upon the Lord with holy importunity of prayer, and your reward shall more than repay you. It is good for us to be compelled to pray like this ; it brings us up from spiritual childhood to perfect manhood. Therefore be ye constant in prayer, and gather strength for importunate pleadings.

No reason can be given why we should not continue in prayer. I can suppose one brother saying, “I feel I cannot pray.” When you feel you cannot pray, be sure that you are more in need of prayer than ever. Is not a disinclination to prayer one of the saddest marks of your soul’s condition, one of those reasons which ought above all others to drive you to the mercy-seat? “Would you say the same, sir, if I tell you that I can pray?” Precisely the same, for now when the wind is favourable you should hoist all sail. If you cannot make progress now, when will you? Therefore pray when you can pray, and pray when you cannot pray. “Alas, sir, I cannot get beyond a groan.” Brother, be not distressed, for the best praying in all the world consists of “groanings that cannot be uttered.” We may sometimes have a doubt whether the Spirit of God helps us to pray in cheerful prayers, though I do not say that there is any need for the doubt,—but we cannot have a question about our sad prayings, for it is expressly said he “maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.” Do you think that the chief end of a Christian’s life is to be comfortable? It is often more good to us to mourn like doves than to sing like nightingales. Sometimes there may be more prayer in a sigh than in a long oration. Often do I myself personally look back upon times of bondage when I cried to God with all my soul, and thought I did not pray, and I wish that I prayed now as I did then. Therefore always pray; whether you feel in a mind for prayer or not, still pray. The

fisherman at Mentone keep on fishing with their great net; ay, by the score these fishermen take it out and haul it in again, and frequently they get no more than one little sardine for their pains. Many and many a time I have seen no more than they could hold in their hand as the produce of a net which covered acres of the sea. But why do they go on? Because they are fishermen, and cannot do anything else. You and I are praying men, and there is nothing else we can do but wait upon the Lord. So if, after many a throw of the net, we get but one small answer, we will try again, for this is all we can do. "Lord, to whom should we go but thee?"

Continue in prayer because *the continuance of our instancy in prayer is the test of the reality of our devotion*. Men that are in business and are in earnest cannot afford to open the shop and do a little occasional trade, and then put up a notice, "The proprietor of this shop has gone out for an excursion, and will resume his business when he feels inclined to." This would be trifling, and not trading; and it is so in prayer: a little bit of praying and then a stretch of neglect will prove a delusion and a snare. A poor simpleton who had never been to sea before, when he was going to Australia, asked a friend on board the vessel what the sailors did with the vessel at night. "Do of a night," was the reply, "Why, sail as fast as they can go." "I did not know," he said, "they worked in the night, I thought they stopped the ship." He must have thought he was out on some pleasure excursion along the coast, and that the yacht would anchor when the sun went down; but he was in an ocean clipper which was out for work and not for play. The man who means business must sail whether it is dark or light; and so in prayer we must serve God instantly, both day and night. Real prayers are constant prayers. There is a fish, you know, that sometimes attempts to fly, but it is no bird for all that. It only takes a little flight and then it is in the water again; but a true bird keeps on the wing, especially if it is such a bird as the eagle, whose untiring wing bears it above the clouds. Beware of prayers which leap up like a grasshopper and are soon down again. Let your prayers have the wings of a dove, let them fly away from earth and rest in God. Hypocrites pray by fits and starts, the genuine Christian "prays without ceasing."

Beware of judging yourselves by certain spasms of prayer. When I put my lamp out last night, as I thought, it flashed up, then went down again, and yet again flashed up; it did so many times, as I stood waiting, but I knew it must go out ere long. Some have a way of flashing a prayer or two, but their piety is only a dying light, it will all be over soon. Continue instant in prayer, it shall be the test of whether your prayer is a lamp of the Lord or a dying light of your own kindling.

Beloved, we must continue in prayer, but the Holy Spirit alone can enable us to do it. We may, however, be much helped in it by occasionally setting apart a special time. Days of prayer and hours of prayer, and set seasons of prayer are very helpful. We ought to have our appointed seasons each day, but special times over and above our regular custom may stir the fire and enable it to burn more brightly. To unite with other Christians in prayer is often very helpful. Private prayer is more important than public prayer under any aspects, and is a better test of a Christian; still public prayer often reacts upon private devotion, and when two or three are together, and are agreed as touching the kingdom, their supplications will often be helpful to each other and obtain the thing which they desire.

III. Our last word EXPECTANT. It is not in the text verbally, but it must be there really, because there will be no such thing as instancy or constancy unless there is an expectation, and a belief that God can and will give that which we seek. Let us go back to our dog again: the dog would not run at so great a rate if he did not expect to seize his prey; but see how every limb is stretched with intensity, and he goes over hedge and ditch after his game because he has almost seized it, and

though it flies before him with all its might, yet he close upon it. There is no praying with any fervour unless there is faith that God will hear you; at least if instancy can be felt for a while, constancy cannot be kept up long without it. Expectancy that God will hear. I was awakened at about four o'clock this morning by a sharp shrill sound. I thought it was a swallow screaming by the window, and I fell asleep again. A young bird had found its way into my room, and was crying for liberty. I left my bed and opened the window to let the captive free. It did not seem to know its way, and so I caught it and gently placed it at the window, and in a moment it flew to the oak tree close by and sat itself down. I watched its movement. The moment it had perched itself comfortably it began to utter sharp cries, and it turned its little head round on all sides as if looking for some one. It was crying for its mother, and why? *Because it expected to be fed.* And why did it expect to be fed? *Because it had been fed before.* If it had been a full-grown bird, it would not have called for food, but would have helped itself; but this poor little creature had been nourished by its parents, and it was looking round to be supplied again. This is why we pray. O Lord, thou hast supplied our wants so long and so often in answer to prayer, that we are in the way of it; and now we pray, not only because we ought to do so, but because it has become natural to us to pray, and we expect thee to hear us. When thou dost hear us we bless thee, but we are not *surprised*, as though it were a strange thing. Thy truth causes great admiration but no astonishment, for it is like thee to keep thy word, We are poor dependent children, and thou a wise and tender Father; thou has never left us and thou wilt never leave us, and so we continue instant in prayer, because we are expectant of thy grace. Some professors seldom exercise expectancy in prayer, but the soul of prayer is gone when you have no expectation. God will the cry of your desire, but the hand into which he will put the mercy is the hand of your expectation. You must believe that you have the blessing, or you will not have it unless it be by some extraordinary mercy beyond what is promised. His usual way is to raise our expectations so that we look out for the favour, and then he sends it. If some people looked out for answers to prayer they might soon have them, for their prayers would be answered by themselves. I was reminded of that by a little boy whose father prayed in the family that the Lord would visit the poor and relieve their wants. When he had finished, his little boy said, "Father, I wish I had your money." "Why so?" "Because," he said, "I would answer your prayers for you." "Which prayers, John?" "Why, father, you prayed that the poor might be helped, and you could do it very well with your own money." I like better still that story of the good man at the prayer-meeting, who reading the list of prayers found one for a poor widow that her distress might be relived, so he began to read it, but stopped and added, "we won't trouble the Lord with that, I will attend to that myself." Numbers of prayers are of that kind: we are praying God to do what we ought to do ourselves, and that is sheer impertinence. If we really prayed in earnest, expecting to be heard, our answer would often come in this very way, by our being stirred up to see that the Lord had heard us. The Lord might well say to us, "Thou sayest, Thy kingdom come; arise and help to make my kingdom come! Thou askest that my name may be hallowed; go thyself and hallow my name." Oh, that we had the expectancy which would teach us practical action, so that we should find the answer to our prayer given before we asked, according to the promise, "Before they call I will answer them, and while they are yet speaking I will hear."

I had many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now, for the time has passed. I shall close by recommending to all of you one simple but very comprehensive prayer. It was offered by a poor man in Fife, and it was copied out by the Duchess of Gordon, and found among her papers when she died. "O Lord, give me grace to feel my need of thy grace! Give me grace to ask for thy

grace! Give me grace to receive thy grace!" See ye not what scope there is for prayer! You will never need to leave off pleading for want of subjects. Continue, therefore, to be instant in it.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Romans 12.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK."—30, 981, 978.

GIRLS' ORPHANAGE.—We have purchased "The Hawthorns," near the Boys' Orphanage, for £4,000, in order to commence an institution for fatherless girls. We earnestly desire to pay the money when it is due, namely, on the 15th of July next. This will need not only liberal help, but help given *speedily*, for the time is very limited. Up to this moment, in all our movements, we have paid our way with ready money, and it would rejoice our heart if we should be enabled to do so now. About £1,200 has been given or promised.

C.H. Spurgeon.

The Shame and Spitting

A Sermon

(No. 1486)

Delivered on Lord's-Day Morning, July 27th, 1879, by

C. H. SPURGEON,

At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington.

“I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair: I hid not my face from shame and spitting.”—Isaiah 50:6.

OF WHOM SPEAKETH THE PROPHET this? Of himself or of some other? We cannot doubt but what Isaiah here wrote concerning the Lord Jesus Christ. Is not this one of the prophecies to which our Lord Himself referred in the incident recorded in the eighteenth chapter of Luke's Gospel at the thirty-first verse? “Then he took unto him he twelve, and said unto them, Behold, we go up to Jerusalem, and all things that are written by the prophets concerning the Son of man shall be accomplished. For he shall be delivered unto the Gentiles, and shall be mocked, and spitefully entreated, and spitted on: and they shall scourge him and put him to death.” Such a remarkable prophecy of scourging and spitting as this which is now before us must surely refer to the Lord Jesus; its highest fulfillment is assuredly found in Him alone.

Of whom else, let me ask, could you conceive the prophet to have spoken if you read the whole chapter? Of whom else could he say in the same breath, “I clothe the heavens with blackness and I make sackcloth their covering. I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair” (vv. 3, 6). What a descent from the omnipotence which veils the heavens with clouds to the gracious condescension which does not veil its own face, but permits it to be spat upon! No other could thus have spoken of Himself but He who is both God and man. He must be divine: how else could He say, “Behold, at my rebuke I dry up the sea, I make the rivers a wilderness” (v. 2)? And yet he must at the same time be a “man of sorrows and acquainted with grief,” for there is a strange depth of pathos in the words, “I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair: I hid not my face from shame and spitting.” Whatever others may say, we believe that the speaker in this verse is Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews, the Son of God and the Son of man, our Redeemer. It is the Judge of Israel whom they have smitten with a rod upon the cheek who here plaintively declares the griefs which He has undergone. We have before us the language of prophecy, but it is as accurate as though it had been written at the moment of the event. Isaiah might have been one of the Evangelists, so exactly does he describe what our Saviour endured.

I have already laid before you in the reading of the Scriptures some of the passages of the New Testament wherein the scourging and the shame of our Lord Jesus are described. We saw Him first at the tribunal of His own countrymen in Matthew 26, and we read, “Then did they spit in his face, and buffeted him: and others smote him with the palms of their hands.” It was in the hall of the high priest, among His own countrymen, that first of all the shameful deeds of scorn were wrought upon Him. “He came unto his own, and his own received him not.” His worst foes were they of His own household; they despised and abhorred Him, and would have none of Him. His own Father's husbandmen said among themselves—“This is the heir; let us kill him, and let us seize on his inheritance.” This was His treatment at the hand of the house of Israel.

The same treatment, or the like thereto, was accorded Him in Herod's palace, where the fingering shade of a Jewish royalty still existed. There what I might venture to call a pattern mixture of Jew and Gentile power held court, but our Lord fared no better in the united company. By the two combined the Lord was treated with equal derision (Luke 23:11). "Herod with his men of war set him at naught, and mocked him, and arrayed him in a gorgeous robe."

Speedily came His third trial, and He was delivered altogether to the Gentiles. Then Pilate, the governor, gave Him up to the cruel process of scourging. Scourging as it has been practiced in the English army is atrocious, a barbarism which ought to make us blush for the past, and resolve to end it for the future. How is it that such a horror has been tolerated so long in a country where we are not all savages? But the lash is nothing among us compared with what it was among the Romans. I have heard that it was made of the sinews of oxen, and that in it were twisted the knucklebones of sheep, with slivers of bone, in order that every stroke might more effectually tear its way into the poor quivering flesh, which was mangled by its awful strokes. Scourging was such a punishment that it was generally regarded as worse than death itself, and indeed, many perished while enduring it, or soon afterwards. Our blessed Redeemer gave His back to the smiters, and the plowers made deep furrows there. O spectacle of misery! How can we bear to look thereon? Nor was that all, for Pilate's soldier's, calling all the band together, as if there were not enough for mockery unless all were mustered, put Him to derision by a mock enthronement and a mimic coronations and when they had thus done they again buffeted and smote Him, and spat in His face. There was no kind of cruelty which their heartlessness could just then invent which they did not exercise upon His blessed Person: their brutal sport had full indulgence, for their innocent victim offered neither resistance nor remonstrance. This is His own record of His patient endurance. "I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair: I hid not my face from shame and spitting."

Behold your King! I bring Him forth to you this morning in spirit and cry, "Behold the Man!" Turn hither all your eyes and hearts and look upon the despised and rejected of men! Gaze reverently and lovingly, with awe for His sufferings and love for His Person. The sight demands adoration. I would remind you of that which Moses did when he saw the bush that burned and was not consumed—fit emblem of our Lord on fire with griefs and yet not destroyed; I bid you turn aside and see this great sight, but first attend to the mandate—"Put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground." All round the cross the soil is sacred. Our suffering Lord has consecrated every place whereon He stood, and therefore our hearts must be filled with reverence while we linger under the shadow of His passion.

May the Holy Spirit help you to see Jesus in four lights at this time. In each view He is worthy of devout attention. Let us view Him first as *the representative of God*; secondly, as *the substitute of His people*, thirdly, as *the servant of Jehovah*; and fourthly, as *the Comforter of his redeemed*.

I. First, I invite you to gaze upon your despised and rejected Lord as **THE REPRESENTATIVE OF GOD**. In the Person of Christ Jesus, God Himself came into the world, making a special visitation to Jerusalem and the Jewish people, but at the same time coming very near to all mankind. The Lord called to the people whom He had favored so long and whom He was intent to favor still. He says, in the second verse, "I came" and "I called." God did in very deed come down into the midst of mankind.

Be it noted, that when our Lord came into this world as the Representative of God, He came with all His divine power about Him. The chapter before us says, "Is my hand shortened at all, that it cannot redeem? or have I no power to deliver? behold, at my rebuke I dry up the sea, I make the

rivers a wilderness.” The Son of God, when He was here, did not perform those exact miracles, because He was bent upon marvels of beneficence rather than of judgment. He did not repeat the plagues of Egypt, for He did not come to smite, but to save; but He did greater wonders and wrought miracles which ought far more powerfully to have won men’s confidence in Him because they were full of goodness and mercy. He fed the hungry, He healed the sick, He raised the dead, and He cast out devils. He did equal marvels to those which were wrought in Egypt when the arm of the Lord was made bare in the eyes of all the people. It is true He did not change water into blood, but He turned water into wine. It is true He did not make their fish to stink, but by His word He caused the net to be filled even to bursting with great fishes. He did not break the whole staff of bread as He did in Egypt, but He multiplied loaves and fishes so that thousands of men and women and children were fed from His bounteous hand. He did not slay their first-born, but He restored the dead. I grant you that the glory of the Godhead was somewhat hidden in the Person of Jesus of Nazareth, but it was still there, even as the glory was upon the face of Moses when he covered it with a veil. No essential attribute of God was absent in Christ, and every one might have been seen in Him if the people had not been willfully blind. He did the works of His Father, and those works bore witness of Him that He was come in His Father’s name. Yes, God was personally in the world when Jesus walked the blessed fields of the Holy land, now, alas, laid under the curse for rejecting Him.

But when God thus came among, men He was unacknowledged. What saith the prophet? “Wherefore when I came was there no man? when I called was there none to answer?” A few, taught by the Spirit of God, discerned Him and rejoiced; but they were so very few that we may say of the whole generation that they knew Him not. Those who had some dim idea of His excellence and majesty yet rejected Him. Herod, because he feared that He was King, sought to slay Him. The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers took counsel together, against the Lord, and against His anointed. He was emphatically and beyond all others “despised and rejected of men.” Though, as I have said, the Godhead in Him was but scantily veiled, and gleams of its glory burst forth ever and anon, yet still the people would have none of it, and the cry, “Away with him. away with him, let him be crucified,” was the verdict of the age upon which He descended. He called and there was none to answer; He spread out His hands all the day long unto a rebellious people who utterly rejected Him.

Yet our Lord when He came into the world was admirably adapted to be the Representative of God, not only because He was God Himself, but because as man His whole human nature was consecrated to the work, and in Him was neither flaw nor spot. He was untouched by any motive other than the one desire of manifesting the Father and blessing the sons of men. Oh, beloved, there was never One who had His ear so near the mouth of God as Jesus had. His Father had no need to speak to Him in dreams and visions of the night, for when all His faculties were wide awake there was nothing in them to hinder His understanding the mind of God; and therefore every morning when His Father wakened Him He spoke into His ear. Jesus sat as a scholar at the Father’s feet that He might learn first, and then teach. The things which He heard of the Father He made known unto men. He says that He spoke not His own words but the words of Him that sent Him, and He did not His own deeds, but “my Father,” saith He, “that dwelleth in me, he doeth the work.” Now, a man thus entirely agreeable to the mind and will of the great God was fitted to be the Representative of God. Both the alliance of His manhood with the Godhead and its perfect character qualified it to be the fittest dwelling of God among men. Yes, dear friends, our Saviour came in a way which

should at once have commanded the reverent homage of all men. Even His great Father said, "They will reverence my Son." Enough of the Godhead was manifested to impress and no more, lest it should alarm. With a soul of gentlest mold and a body like our own He was altogether adapted to be the Representative of God. His errand, too, was all gentleness and love, for He came to speak words in season to the weary, and to comfort those that were cast down: surely such an errand should have secured Him a welcome. His course and conduct were most conciliatory, for He went among the people, and ate with publicans and sinners; so gentle was He that He took little children in His arms, and blessed them; for this, if for nothing else, they ought to have welcomed Him right heartily and rejoiced at the sight of Him. Our text tells us how contrary was their conduct towards Him to that which He deserved instead of being welcomed He was scourged, and instead of being honored He was scorned. Cruelty smote His back and plucked off the hair from His face, while derision jeered at Him and cast its spittle upon Him. Shame and contempt were poured upon Him, though He was God Himself. That spectacle of Christ spat upon, and scourged represents what man virtually does to his God, what he would do to the Most High if he could. Hart well puts it—

See how the patient Jesus stands,
 Insulted in his lowest case!
 Sinners have bound the Almighty hands,
 And spit in their Creator's face.

When our parents broke the command of their Maker, obeying the advice of the devil rather than the Word of God, and preferring a poor apple to the divine favor, they did as it were spit into the face of God; and every sin committed since has been a repetition of the same contempt of the Eternal One. When a man will have his pleasure, even though it displeases God, he as good as declares that he despises God, prefers himself, and defies the wrath of the Most High. When a man acts contrary to the command of God he does as good as say to God, "This is better for me to do than what Thou bidst me do. Either Thou art mistaken, in thy prohibitions, or else Thou dost willfully deny me the highest pleasure, and I, being a better judge of my own interests than Thou art, snatch at the pleasure which Thou dost refuse me. I judge Thee either to be unwise or unkind." Every act of sin does despite to the sovereignty of God: it denies Him to be supreme and refuses Him obedience. Every act of sin does dishonor to the love and wisdom of God, for it seems to say that it would have been greater love to have permitted us to do evil than to have commanded us to abstain from it. All sin is in many ways an insult to the majesty of the thrice Holy God, and He regards it as such.

Dear friends, this is especially the sin of those who have heard the gospel and yet reject the Saviour, for in their case the Lord has come to them in the most gracious form, and yet they have refused Him. The Lord might well say, "I have come to you to save you, and you will not regard me. I have come saying to you, 'Look unto me and be ye saved all the ends of the earth,' and you close your eyes in unbelief. I have come saying, 'Let us reason together: though your sins be as crimson, they shall be as wool,' but you will not be cleansed from your iniquity. I have come with the promise, 'All manner of sin and iniquity shall be forgiven unto men.' What is your reply?" In the case of many the answer is, "We prefer our own righteousness to the righteousness of God." If that is not casting spittle into the face of God I know not what is, for our righteousnesses are well described as "filthy rags," and we have the impudence to say that these are better than the righteousness of God in Christ Jesus. Or if we do not say this when we reject the Saviour we tell Him that we do not want Him, for we do not need a Saviour: this is as good as to say that God has

played the fool with the life and death of His own Son. What greater derision can be cast upon God than to consider the blood of atonement to be a superfluity? He who chooses sin sooner than repentance prefers to suffer the wrath of God rather than be holy and dwell in heaven forever. For the sake of a few paltry pleasures men forego the love of God, and are ready to run the risk of an eternity of divine wrath. They think so little of God that He is of no account with them at all. All this is in reality a scorning and despising of the Lord God, and is well set forth by the insults which were poured upon the Lord Jesus.

Woe's me that it should ever be so. My God! My God! To what a sinful race do I belong. Alas, that it should treat thine infinite goodness so spitefully! That Thou shouldst be rejected at all, but especially that Thou shouldst be rejected when dressed in robes of love and arrayed in gentleness and pity is horrible to think upon. Do you mean it, O men? Can you really mean it? Can you deride the Lord Jesus who died for men? For which of His works do ye stone Him, when He lived only to do good? For which of His griefs do you refuse Him, when He died only that He might save? "He saved others, himself he cannot save," for He had so much love that He could spare Himself. I can understand your resisting the thunder of Jehovah's power, for I know your insanity; but can you resist the tenderness of Jehovah's love? If you do I must charge you with brutality, but therein I wrong the brutes, to whom such crimes are impossible. I may not even call this cruel scorning *diabolical*, for it is a sin which devils never did commit, perhaps would not have committed had it been possible to them. They have never trifled with a Redeemer, nor rejected the blood of the seed of Abraham. Shall the favored race spit upon its friend? God grant we may be brought to a better mind. But there is the picture before you. God Himself set at naught, despised, rejected, put to shame, perpetually dishonored in the Person of His dear Son. The sight should breed repentance in us. We should look to Him whom we have scourged, and mourn for Him. O Holy Spirit, work this tender grace in all our hearts.

II. And now, secondly, I want to set the Lord Jesus before you in another light, or rather beseech Him to shine in His own light before your eyes:—AS THE SUBSTITUTE FOR HIS PEOPLE. Recollect when our Lord Jesus Christ suffered thus it was not on His own account nor purely for the sake of His Father, but He "was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed." There has risen up a modern idea which I cannot too much reprobate, that Christ made no atonement for our sin except upon the cross: whereas in this passage of Isaiah we are taught as plainly as possible that by His bruising and His stripes, as well as by His death, we are healed. Never divide between the life and the death of Christ. How could He have died if He had not lived? How could He suffer except while He lived? Death is not suffering, but the end of it. Guard also against the evil notion that you have nothing to do with the righteousness of Christ, for He could not have made an atonement by His blood if He had not been perfect in His life. He could not have been acceptable if He had not first been proven to be holy, harmless, and undefiled. The victim must be spotless, or it cannot be presented for sacrifice. Draw no nice lines and raise no quibbling questions, but look at your Lord as He is and bow before Him.

Understand, my dear brothers and sisters, that Jesus took upon Himself our sin, and being found bearing that sin He had to be treated as sin should be treated. Now, of all the things that ever existed sin is the most shameful thing that can be. It deserves to be scourged, it deserves to be spit upon, it deserves to be crucified; and because our Lord had taken upon Himself our sin, therefore must He be put to shame, therefore must He be scourged. If you want to see what God thinks of sin, see

His only Son spat upon by the soldiers when He was made sin for us. In God's sight sin is a shameful, horrible, loathsome, abominable thing, and when Jesus takes it He must be forsaken and given up to scorn. This sight will be the more wonderful to you when you recollect who it was that was spat upon, for if you and I, being sinners, were scourged, and smitten, and despised, there would be no wonder in it; but He who took our sin was God, before whom angels bow with reverent awe, and yet, seeing the sin was upon Him, He was made subject to the most intense degree of shame. Seeing that Jesus stood in our stead, it is written of the eternal Father that "He spared not his own Son." "It pleased the Father to bruise him: he hath put him to grief"; He made His soul an offering for sin. Yes, beloved, sin is condemned in the flesh and made to appear exceeding shameful when you recollect that, even though it was only laid on our blessed Lord by imputation, yet it threw Him into the very depths of shame and woe ere it could be removed.

Reflect, also, upon the voluntariness of all this. He willingly submitted to the endurance of suffering and scorn. It is said in the text, "He *gave* his back to the smiters." They did not seize and compel Him, or; if they did, yet they could nor have done it without His consent. He gave His back to the smiters He gave His cheek to those that plucked off the hair. He did not hide His face from shame and spitting: He did not seek in any way to escape from insults. It was the voluntariness of His grief which constituted in great measure the merit of it. That Christ should stand in our stead by force were a little thing, even had it been possible; but that He should stand there of His own free will, and that being there He should willingly be treated with derision, this is grace indeed. The Son of God was willingly made a curse for us, and at His own desire was made subject to shame on our account. I do not know how you feel in listening to me, but while I am speaking I feel as if language ought scarcely to touch such a theme as this: it is too feeble for its task. I want you to get beyond my words if you can, and for yourselves meditate upon the fact that He who covers the heavens with blackness, yet did not cover His own face, and He who binds up the universe with the girdle which holds it in one, yet was bound and blindfolded by the men He had Himself made; He whose face is as the brightness of the sun that shineth in its strength was once spit upon. Surely we shall need faith in heaven to believe this wondrous fact. Can it have been true, that the glorious Son of God was jeered and jested at? I have often heard that there is no faith wanted in heaven, but I rather judge that we shall want as much faith to believe that these things were ever done as the patriarchs had to believe that they would be done. How shall I sit down and gaze upon *Him* and think that His dear face was once profaned with spittle? When all heaven shall lie prostrate at His feet in awful silence of adoration will it seem possible that once He was mocked? When angels and principalities, and powers shall all be roused to rapture of harmonious music in His praise, will it seem possible that once the most abject of men plucked out the hair? Will it not appear incredible that those sacred hands, which are "as gold rings set with the beryl," were once nailed to a gibbet, and that those cheeks which are "as a bed of spices, as sweet flowers," should have been battered and bruised? We shall be quite certain of the fact, and yet we shall never cease to wonder, that His side was gashed, and His face was spit upon? The sin of man in this instance will always amaze us. How could you commit this crime? Oh, ye sons of men, how could ye treat such an One with cruel scorn? O thou brazen thing called sin, thou hast, indeed, as the prophet saith, "a whores forehead"; thou hast a demons heart, hell burns within thee. Why couldst thou not spit upon earthly splendors? Why must heaven be thy scorn? Or if heaven, why not spit on angels! Was there no place for thy spittle but *His* face? *His* face! Woe is me! His face! Should such loveliness receive

such shame as this? I could wish that man had never been created, or that being created, he had been swept into nothingness rather than have lived to commit such horror.

Yet, here is matter for our faith to rest upon, Beloved, trust yourselves in the hands of your great Substitute. Did He bear all this shame? Then there must be more than enough merit and efficacy in this, which was the prelude of His precious death—and especially in His death itself—there must be merit sufficient to put away all transgression, iniquity, and sin. Our shame is ended, for He has borne it! Our punishment is removed: He has endured it all. Double for all our sins has our Redeemer paid. Return unto thy rest, O my soul, and let peace take full possession of thy weeping heart.

III. But time fails us, and therefore we will mention, next, the third light in which it is our desire to see the Saviour. Beloved, we desire to see the Lord Jesus Christ AS THE SERVANT OF GOD. He took upon Himself the form of a servant when He was made in the likeness of man. Observe how He performed this service right thoroughly, and remember we are to look upon this third picture as our copy, which is to be the guide of our life. I know that many of you are glad to call yourselves the servants of God; take not the name in vain. As Jesus was, so are you also in this world, and you are to seek to be like Him.

First, as a servant, Christ was personally prepared for service. He was thirty years and more here below, learning obedience in His Father's house, and the after years were spent in learning obedience by the things which He suffered. What a servant He was, for He never went about His own errands nor went by His own will, but He waited always upon His Father. He was in constant communication with heaven, both by day and by night. He says, "He wakeneth morning by morning, he wakeneth mine ear to hear as the learned." The blessed Lord or ever the day broke heard that gentle voice which called Him, and at its whisper He arose before the sunrise, and there the dawning found Him, on the mountain side, waiting upon God in wrestling prayer, taking His message from the Father that He might go and deliver it to the children of men. He loved man much, but He loved His Father more, and He never came to tell out the love of God without having as man received it fresh from the divine heart. He knew that His Father heard Him always, and He lived in the spirit of conscious acceptance. Have you ever noticed that sometimes a passage will begin, "At that time Jesus answered and said," and yet there is no notice that He had been speaking to anybody before, or that anybody had been speaking to Him? What He said was an answer to a voice which no ear heard but His own, for He was always standing with opened ear, listening to the eternal voice. Such service did Jesus render, and you must render the same. You cannot do your Lord's will except you live near to Him. It is of no use trying to preach with power unless we get our message from our heavenly Father's own Self. I am sure you as hearers know the difference between a dead word which comes from a man's own brain and lip, and a living word which the preacher delivers fresh as the manna which fell from heaven. The word should come from the minister like bread hot from the oven, or better still, like a seed with life in it; not as a parched grain with the germ dead and killed, but as a living seed which roots itself in your souls, and springs up to a harvest. This made our Lord such a good servant that He listened to His Father's voice and yielded Himself to the Father's will to perfection.

Our text assures us that this service knew no reserve in its consecration. *We* generally draw back somewhere. I am ashamed to say it, but I mourn that I have done so. Many of us could give to Christ all our health and strength, and all the money we have, very heartily and cheerfully; but when it comes to a point of reputation we feel the pinch. To be slandered, to have some filthy thing

said of you; this is too much for flesh and blood. You seem to say, "I cannot be made a fool of, I cannot bear to be regarded as a mere impostor"; but a true servant of Christ must make himself of no reputation when he takes upon himself the work of his Lord. Our blessed Master was willing to be scoffed at by the lewdest and lowest of men. The abjects jeered at Him; the reproach of them that reproached God fell upon Him. He became the song of the drunkard, and when the rough soldiery detained Him in the guard-room they heaped up their ridicule, as though He were not worthy of the name of man.

They bow their knees to me, and cry, "Hail, King":

Whatever scoffs or scornfulness can bring,

I am the floor, the sink, where they it fling:

Was ever grief like mine?

The soldiers also spit upon that face

Which angels did desire to have the grace

And prophets once to see, but found no place:

Was ever grief like mine?

Herod and Pilate were the very dross of men, and yet He permitted them to judge Him. Their servants were vile fellows, and yet He resigned Himself to them. If He had breathed upon them with angry breath, He might have flashed devouring fire upon them, and burned them up as stubble; but His omnipotent patience restrained His indignation, and He remained as a sheep before her shearers. He allowed His own creatures to pluck His hair and spit in His face. Such patience should be yours as servants of God. We are to be willing to be made nothing of, and even to be counted as the offscouring of all things. It is pitiful for the Christian to refuse to suffer, and to become a fighting man, crying, "We must stand up for our rights." Did you ever see Jesus in that posture? There is a propensity in us to say, "I will have it out." Yes, but you cannot picture Jesus in that attitude. I defy a painter to depict Him so: it is somebody else, and not Christ. No! He said, "I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair: I hid not my face from shame and spitting."

There is something more here than perfect consecration in the mere form of it, for its heart and essence are manifest in an obedient delight in the will of the Father. The words seem to me to express alacrity. It is not said that He reluctantly permitted His enemies to pluck His hair, or smite His back, but it is written, "I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair." He could not delight in it; how could He delight in suffering and shame? These things were even more repugnant to His sensitive nature than they can be to us; and yet, "For the joy that was set before him he endured the cross, despising the shame." He was ready for this dreadful treatment, for He said, "I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how am I straitened until it be accomplished!" He was ready for the cup of gall, and willing to drink it to its dregs, though it was bitterness itself to Him. He gave His back to the smiters.

All this while—now follow me in this next point—there was no flinching in Him. They spat in His face, but what says He in the seventh verse. "I have set my face like a flint." If they are about to defile His face He is resolved to bear it; He girds up His loins and makes Himself more determined. Oh, the bravery of our Master's silence! Cruelty and shame could not make Him speak. Have not your lips sometimes longed to speak out a denial and a defense? Have you not felt it wise to be quiet, but then the charge has been so excessively cruel, and it has stung you so terribly that you hungered to resent it. Base falsehoods aroused your indignation, and you felt you must speak and

probably you did speak, though you tried to keep your lips as with a bridle while the wicked were before you. But our own beloved Lord in the omnipotence of His patience and love would not utter a word, but like a lamb at the slaughter He opened not His mouth. He witnessed a good confession by His matchless silence. Oh, how might—how gloriously mighty was His patience! We must copy it if we are to be His disciples. We, too, must set our faces like flints, to move or to sit still, according to the Father's will, to be silent or to speak, as most shall honor Him. "I have set my face like a flint," saith He, even though in another place He cries, "My heart is like wax, it is melted in the midst of my bowels."

And do you notice all the while the confidence and quiet of His spirit? He almost seems to say, "You may spit upon Me, but you cannot find fault with Me. You may pluck my hair, but you cannot impugn my integrity; you may lash my shoulders, but you cannot impute a fault to Me. Your false witnesses dare not look Me in the face: let Me know who is mine adversary, let him come near to Me. Behold, Adonai Jehovah will keep Me, who is he that shall condemn me! Lo, they all shall wax old as a garment, the moth shall eat them up." Be calm then, O true servant of God! In patience possess your soul. Serve God steadily and steadfastly though all men should belie you. Go to the bottom of the service, dive even to the very depth, and be content even to lie in Christ's grave, for you shall share in Christ's resurrection. Do not dream that the path to heaven is up the hill of honor, it winds down into the valley of humiliation. Imagine not that you can grow great eternally by being great here. You must become less, and less, and less, even though you should be despised and rejected of men, for this is the path to everlasting glory.

I have not time to expound the last two verses of the chapter, but they read you a noble lesson. "He gave his back to the smiters"; if, then, any of you walk in darkness and have no light, this is no new thing for a servant of God. The chief of all servants persevered, though men despised Him. Follow Him, then. Stay yourselves upon God as He did, and look for a bright ending of your trials. He came out into the light ultimately, and there He sits in inconceivable splendor at His Father's right hand, and so shall all the faithful come out of the cloud and shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Only bear on with resolute patience, and glory shall be *your* reward, even as it is His.

IV. Lastly, I am to set Him forth in His fourth character, as THE COMFORTER OF HIS PEOPLE; but I must ask *you* to do this, while I just, as it were, make a charcoal sketch of the picture I would have painted.

Remember, first, our blessed Lord is well qualified to speak a word in season to him that is weary, because He Himself is lowly, and meek, and so accessible to us. When men are in low spirits they feel as if they could not take comfort from persons who are harsh and proud. The Comforter must come as a sufferer; He must come in a lowly broken spirit, if He would cheer the afflicted. You must not put on your best dress to go and visit the daughter of poverty, or go with your jewels about you to show how much better off you are than she. Sit down by the side of the downcast man and let him know that you are meek and lowly of heart. Your Master "gave his back to the smiters, and his cheek to them that plucked off the hair," and therefore He is the Comforter you want.

Remark not only His lowliness, but His sympathy. Are you full of aches and pains this morning? Jesus knows all about them, for He "gave his back to the smiters." Do you suffer from what is worse than pain, from scandal and slander? "He hid not his face from shame and spitting." Have you been ridiculed of late? Have the graceless made fun of your godliness? Jesus can sympathize with you, for you know what unholy mirth they made out of Him. In every pang that rends your

heart your Lord has borne His share. Go and tell Him. Many will not understand you. You are a speckled bird, differing from all the rest, and they will all peck at you; but Jesus Christ knows this, for He was a speckled bird, too. He was “holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners,” but not separate from such as you. Get you to Him and He will sympathize with you.

In addition to His gentle spirit and His power to sympathize, there is this to help to comfort us—namely, His example, for He can argue thus with you, “I gave my back to the smiters. Cannot you do the like? Shall the disciple be above his Master?” If I can but get on the doorstep of heaven and sit down in the meanest place there I shall feel I have an infinitely better position than I deserve, and shall I think of my dear, blessed Lord and Master giving His face to be spit upon, and then give myself airs, and say, “I cannot bear this scorn, I cannot bear this pain!” What, does the King pass over the brook Kedron, and must there be no brook Kedron for you? Does the Master bear the cross, and must your shoulders never be galled? Did they call the Master of the house “Beelzebub,” and must they call you “Reverend Sir?” Did they laugh at Him, and scoff at Him, and must you be honored? Are you to be “gentleman” and “lady” where Christ was “that fellow”? For His birth they loaned Him a stable, and for His burial He borrowed a grave. O friends, let pride disappear, and let us count it our highest honor to be permitted to stoop as low as ever we can.

And, then, His example further comforts us by the fact that He was calm amid it all. Oh, the deep rest of the Saviour's heart! They set Him up upon that mock throne, but He did not answer with an angry word; they put a reed into His hand, but He did not change it to an iron rod, and break them like potters' vessels, as He might have done. There was no wincing and no pleading for mercy. Sighs of pain were forced from Him, and He said, “I thirst,” for He was not a stoic; but there was no fear of man, or timorous shrinking of heart.

The King of Martyrs well deserves to wear the martyr's crown, for right royally did He endure: there was never a patience like to His. That is your copy, brother, that is your copy, sister—you must write very carefully to write as well as that. You had need your Master held your hand; in fact, whenever children in Christ's school do write according to His copy, it is always because He holds their hand by His Spirit.

Last of all, our Saviour's triumph is meant to be a stimulus and encouragement to us. He stands before us this morning as the Comforter of His people. Consider Him that endured such contradiction of sinners against Himself lest ye be weary and faint in your minds; for though He was once abased and despised, yet now He sitteth at the right hand of God, and reigns over all things; and the day is coming when every knee shall bow before Him, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. They that spat upon Him will rue the day. Come hither, ye that derided Him! He has raised you from the dead, come hither and spit upon Him now! Ye that scourged Him, bring your rods, see what ye can do in this day of his glory! See, they fly before Him, they invoke the hills to shelter them, they ask the rocks to open and conceal them. Yet it is nothing but His face, that selfsame face they spat upon, which is making earth and heaven to flee away. Yea, all things flee before the majesty of his frown who once gave His back to the smiters, and His cheeks to them that plucked off the hair. Be like Him, then, ye who bear His name; trust Him, and live for Him, and you shall reign with Him in glory forever and ever. Amen.

PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Isaiah 1; 53:1-7; Matthew 26:62—68; Luke 23:8—11; Matthew 27:27—30.

HYMNS FROM “Our Own Hymn Book”—327, 937, 268.

How to Read the Bible

A Sermon

(No. 1503)

Delivered by

C. H. SPURGEON,

At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

“Have ye not read?...Have ye not read?...If ye had known what this meaneth.”—Matthew 12:3-7.

THE SCRIBES AND PHARISEES were great readers of the law. They studied the sacred books continually, poring over each word and letter. They made notes of very little importance, but still very curious notes—as to which was the middle verse of the entire old Testament, which verse was halfway to the middle, and how many times such a word occurred, and even how many times a letter occurred, and the size of the letter, and its peculiar position. They have left us a mass of wonderful notes upon the mere words of Holy Scripture. They might have done the same thing upon another book for that matter, and the information would have been about as important as the facts which they have so industriously collected concerning the letter of the old Testament. They were, however, intense readers of the law. They picked a quarrel with the Saviour upon a matter touching this law, for they carried it at their fingers' ends, and were ready to use it as a bird of prey does its talons to tear and rend. Our Lord's disciples had plucked some ears of corn, and rubbed them between their hands. According to Pharisaic interpretation, to rub an ear of corn is a kind of threshing, and, as it is very wrong to thresh on the Sabbath day, therefore it must be very wrong to rub out an ear or two of wheat when you are hungry on the Sabbath morning. That was their argument, and they came to the Saviour with it, and with their version of the Sabbath law. The Saviour generally carried the war into the enemy's camp, and he did so on this occasion. He met them on their own ground, and he said to them, “Have ye not read?”—a cutting question to the scribes and Pharisees, though there is nothing apparently sharp about it. It was very a fair and proper question to put to them; but only think of putting it *to them*. “Have ye not read?” “Read!” they could have said, “Why, we have read the book through very many times. We are always reading it. No passage escapes our critical eyes.” Yet our Lord proceeds to put the question a second time—“Have ye not read?” as if they had not read after all, though they were the greatest readers of the law then living. He insinuates that they have not read at all; and then he gives them, incidentally, the reason why he had asked them whether they had read. He says, “If ye had known what this meaneth,” as much as to say, “Ye have not read, because ye have not understood.” Your eyes have gone over the words, and you have counted the letters, and you have marked the position of each verse and word, and you have said learned things about all the books, and yet you are not even readers of the sacred volume, for you have not acquired the true art of reading; you do not understand, and therefore you do not truly read it. You are mere skimmers and glancers at the Word: you have not read it, for you do not understand it.

I. That is the subject of our present discourse, or, at least the first point of it, that **IN ORDER TO THE TRUE READING OF THE SCRIPTURES THERE MUST BE AN UNDERSTANDING OF THEM.**

I scarcely need to preface these remarks by saying that we must read the Scriptures. You know how necessary it is that we should be fed upon the truth of Holy Scripture. Need I suggest the question as to whether you do read your Bibles or not? I am afraid that this is a magazine reading age a newspaper reading age a periodical reading age, but not so much a Bible reading age as it ought to be. In the old Puritanic times men used to have a scant supply of other literature, but they found a library enough in the one Book, the Bible. And how they did read the Bible! How little of Scripture there is in modern sermons compared with the sermons of those masters of theology, the Puritanic divines! Almost every sentence of theirs seems to cast side lights upon a text of Scripture; not only the one they are preaching about, but many others as well are set in a new light as the discourse proceeds. They introduce blended lights from other passages which are parallel or semi-parallel thereunto, and thus they educate their readers to compare spiritual things with spiritual. I would to God that we ministers kept more closely to the grand old Book. We should be instructive preachers if we did so, even if we were ignorant of "modern thought," and were not "abreast of the times." I warrant you we should be leagues ahead of our times if we kept closely to the Word of God. As for you, my brothers and sisters, who have not to preach, the best food for you is the Word of God itself. Sermons and books are well enough, but streams that run for a long distance above ground gradually gather for themselves somewhat of the soil through which they flow, and they lose the cool freshness with which they started from the spring head. Truth is sweetest where it breaks from the smitten Rock, for at its first gush it has lost none of its heavenliness and vitality. It is always best to drink at the well and not from the tank. You shall find that reading the Word of God for yourselves, reading it rather than notes upon it, is the surest way of growing in grace. Drink of the unadulterated milk of the Word of God, and not of the skim milk, or the milk and water of man's word.

But, now, beloved, our point is that much apparent Bible reading is not Bible reading at all. The verses pass under the eye, and the sentences glide over the mind, but there is no true reading. An old preacher used to say, the Word has mighty free course among many nowadays, for it goes in at one of their ears and out at the other; so it seems to be with some readers—they can read a very great deal, because they do not read anything. The eye glances but the mind never rests. The soul does not light upon the truth and stay there. It flits over the landscape as a bird might do, but it builds no nest there, and finds no rest for the sole of its foot. Such reading is not reading. Understanding the metering is the essence of true reading. Reading has a kernel to it, and the mere shed is little worth. In prayer there is such a thing as praying in prayer—a praying that is in the bowels of the prayer. So in praise there is a praising in song, an inward fire of intense devotion which is the life of the hallelujah. It is so in fasting: there is a fasting which is not fasting, and there is an inward fasting, a fasting of the soul, which is the soul of fasting. It is even so with the reading of the Scriptures. There is an interior reading, a kernel reading—a true and living reading of the Word. This is the soul of reading; and, if it be not there, the reading is a mechanical exercise, and profits nothing. Now, beloved, unless we understand what we read we have not read it; the heart of the reading is absent. We commonly condemn the Romanists for keeping the daily service in the Latin tongue; yet it might as well be in the Latin language as in any other tongue if it be not understood by the people. Some comfort themselves with the idea that they have done a good action when they have read a chapter, into the meaning of which they have not entered at all; but does not nature herself reject this as a mere superstition? If you had turned the book upside down, and spent the same times in looking at the characters in that direction, you would have gained as much good

from it as you will in reading it in the regular way without understanding it. If you had a New Testament in Greek it would be very Greek to some of you, but it would do you as much good to look at *that* as it does to look at the English New Testament unless you read with understanding heart. It is not the letter which saves the soul; the letter killeth in many senses, and never can it give life. If you harp on the letter alone you may be tempted to use it as a weapon against the truth, as the Pharisees did of old, and your knowledge of the letter may breed pride in you to your destruction. It is the spirit, the real inner meaning, that is sucked into the soul, by which we are blessed and sanctified. We become saturated with the Word of God, like Gideon's fleece, which was wet with the dew of heaven; and this can only come to pass by our receiving it into our minds and hearts, accepting it as God's truth, and so far understanding it as to delight in it. We must understand it, then, or else we have not read it aright.

Certainly, the benefit of reading must come to the soul by the way of the understanding. When the high priest went into the holy place he always lit the golden candlestick before he kindled the incense upon the brazen altar, as if to show that the mind must have illumination before the affections can properly rise towards their divine object. There must be knowledge of God before there can be love to God: there must be a knowledge of divine things, as they are revealed, before there can be an enjoyment of them. We must try to make out, as far as our finite mind can grasp it, what God means by this and what he means by that; otherwise we may kiss the book and have no love to its contents, we may reverence the letter and yet really have no devotion towards the Lord who speaks to us in these words. Beloved, you will never get comfort to your soul out of what you do not understand, nor find guidance for your life out of what you do not comprehend; nor can any practical bearing upon your character come out of that which is not understood by you.

Now, if we are thus to understand what we read or otherwise we read in vain, this shows us that when we come to the study of Holy Scripture *we should try to have our mind well awake to it*. We are not always fit, it seems to me, to read the Bible. At times it were well for us to stop before we open the volume. "Put off thy shoe from thy foot, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground." You have just come in from careful thought and anxiety about your worldly business, and you cannot immediately take that book and enter into its heavenly mysteries. As you ask a blessing over your meat before you fall to, so it would be a good rule for you to ask a blessing on the word before you partake of its heavenly food. Pray the Lord to strengthen your eyes before you dare to look into the eternal light of Scripture. As the priests washed their feet at the laver before they went to their holy work, so it were well to wash the soul's eyes with which you look upon God's word, to wash even the fingers, if I may so speak—the mental fingers with which you will turn from page to page—that with a holy book you may deal after a holy fashion. Say to your soul—"Come, soul, wake up: thou art not now about to read the newspaper; thou art not now perusing the pages of a human poet to be dazzled by his flashing poetry; thou art coming very near to God, who sits in the Word like a crowned monarch in his halls. Wake up, my glory; wake up, all that is within me. Though just now I may not be praising and glorifying God, I am about to consider that which should lead me so to do, and therefore it is an act of devotion. So be on the stir, my soul: be on the stir, and bow not sleepily before the awful throne of the Eternal." Scripture reading is our spiritual meal time. Sound the gong and call in every faculty to the Lord's own table to feast upon the precious meat which is now to be partaken of; or, rather, ring the church-bell as for worship, for the studying of the Holy Scripture ought to be as solemn a deed as when we lift the psalm upon the Sabbath day in the courts of the Lord's house.

If these things be so, you will see at once, dear friends, that, if you are to understand what you read, *you will need to meditate upon it*. Some passages of Scripture lie clear before us—blessed shallows in which the lambs may wade; but there are deeps in which our mind might rather drown herself than swim with pleasure, if she came there without caution. There are texts of Scripture which are made and constructed on purpose to make us think. By this means, among others, our heavenly Father would educate us for heaven—by making us think our way into divine mysteries. Hence he puts the word in a somewhat involved form to compel us to meditate upon it before we reach the sweetness of it. He might, you know, have explained it to us so that we might catch the thought in a minute, but he does not please to do so in every case. Many of the veils which are cast over Scripture are not meant to hide the meaning from the diligent but to compel the mind to be active, for oftentimes the diligence of the heart in seeking to know the divine mind does the heart more good than the knowledge itself. Meditation and careful thought exercise us and strengthen the soul for the reception of the yet more lofty truths. I have heard that the mothers in the Balearic Isles, in the old times, who wanted to bring their boys up to be good slingers, would put their dinners up above them where they could not get at them until they threw a stone and fetched them down: our Lord wishes us to be good slingers, and he puts up some precious truth in a lofty place where we cannot get it down except by slinging at it; and, at last, we hit the mark and find food for our souls. Then have we the double benefit of learning the art of meditation and partaking of the sweet truth which it has brought within our reach. We must meditate, brothers. These grapes will yield no wine till we tread upon them. These olives must be put under the wheel, and pressed again and again, that the oil may flow therefrom. In a dish of nuts, you may know which nut has been eaten, because there is a little hole which the insect has punctured through the shell—just a little hole, and then inside there is the living thing eating up the kernel. Well, it is a grand thing to bore through the shell of the letter, and then to live inside feeding upon the kernel. I would wish to be such a little worm as that, living within and upon the word of God, having bored my way through the shell, and having reached the innermost mystery of the blessed gospel. The word of God is always most precious to the man who most lives upon it. As I sat last year under a wide-spreading beech, I was pleased to mark with prying curiosity the singular habits of that most wonderful of trees, which seems to have an intelligence about it which other trees have not. I wondered and admired the beech, but I thought to myself, I do not think half as much of this beech tree as yonder squirrel does. I see him leap from bough to bough, and I feel sure that he dearly values the old beech tree, because he has his home somewhere inside it in a hollow place, these branches are his shelter, and those beech-nuts are his food. He lives upon the tree. It is his world, his playground, his granary, his home; indeed, it is everything to him, and it is not so to me, for I find my rest and food elsewhere. With God's word it is well for us to be like squirrels, living in it and living on it. Let us exercise our minds by leaping from bough to bough of it, find our rest and food in it, and make it our all in all. We shall be the people that get the profit out of it if we make it to be our food, our medicine, our treasury, our armour, our rest, our delight. May the Holy Ghost lead us to do this and make the Word thus precious to our souls.

Beloved, I would next remind you that for this end *we shall be compelled to pray*. It is a grand thing to be driven to think, it is a grander thing to be driven to pray through having been made to think. Am I not addressing some of you who do not read the word of God, and am I not speaking to many more who do read it, but do not read it with the strong resolve that they will understand it? I know it must be so. Do you wish to begin to be true readers? Will you henceforth labour to

understand? Then you must get to your knees. You must cry to God for direction. Who understands a book best? The author of it. If I want to ascertain the real meaning of a rather twisted sentence, and the author lives near me, and I can call upon him, I shall ring at his door and say, "Would you kindly tell me what you mean by that sentence? I have no doubt whatever that it is very dear, but I am such a simpleton, that I cannot make it out. I have not the knowledge and grasp of the subject which you possess, and therefore your allusions and descriptions are beyond my range of knowledge. It is quite within your range, and commonplace to you, but it is very difficult to me. Would you kindly explain your meaning to me?" A good man would be glad to be thus treated, and would think it no trouble to unravel his meaning to a candid enquirer. Thus I should be sure to get the correct meaning, for I should be going to the fountain head when I consulted the author himself. So, beloved, the Holy Spirit is with us, and when we take his book and begin to read, and want to know what it means, we must ask the Holy Spirit to reveal the meaning. He will not work a miracle, but he will elevate our minds, and he will suggest to us thoughts which will lead us on by their natural relation, the one to the other, till at last we come to the pith and marrow of his divine instruction. Seek then very earnestly the guidance of the Holy Spirit, for if the very soul of reading be the understanding of what we read, then we must in prayer call upon the Holy Ghost to unlock the secret mysteries of the inspired word.

If we thus ask the guidance and teaching of the Holy Spirit, it will follow, dear friends, that *we shall be ready to use all means arid helps towards the understanding of the Scriptures*. When Philip asked the Ethiopian eunuch whether he understood the prophecy of Isaiah he replied, "How can I, unless some man should guide me?" Then Philip went up and opened to him the word of the Lord. Some, under the pretense of being taught of the Spirit of God refuse to be instructed by books or by living men. This is no honouring of the Spirit of God; it is a disrespect to him, for if he gives to some of his servants more light than to others—and it is clear he does—then they are bound to give that light to others, and to use it for the good of the church. But if the other part of the church refuse to receive that light, to what end did the Spirit of God give it? This would imply that there is a mistake somewhere in the economy of gifts and graces, which is managed by the Holy Spirit. It cannot be so. The Lord Jesus Christ pleases to give more knowledge of his word and more insight into it to some of his servants than to others, and it is ours joyfully to accept the knowledge which he gives in such ways as he chooses to give it. It would be most wicked of us to say, "We will not have the heavenly treasure which exists in earthen vessels. If God will give us the heavenly treasure out of his own hand, but not through the earthen vessel, we will have it; but we think we are too wise, too heavenly minded, too spiritual altogether to care for jewels when they are placed in earthen pots. We will not hear anybody, and we will not read anything except *the book* itself, neither will we accept any light, except that which comes in through a crack in our own roof. We will not see by another man's candle, we would sooner remain in the dark." Brethren, do not let us fall into such folly. Let the light come from God, and though a child shall bring it, we will joyfully accept it. If any one of his servants, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas, shall have received light from him, behold, "all are yours, and ye are Christ's, and Christ is God's," and therefore accept of the light which God has kindled, and ask for grace that you may turn that light upon the word so that when you read it you may understand it.

I do not wish to say much more about this, but I should like to push it home upon some of you. You have Bibles at home, I know; you would not like to be without Bibles, you would think you were heathens if you had no Bibles. You have them very neatly bound, and they are very fine

looking volumes: not much thumbed, not much worn, and not likely to be so, for they only come out on Sundays for an airing, and they lie in lavender with the clean pocket handkerchiefs all the rest of the week. You do not read the word, you do not search it, and how can you expect to get the divine blessing? If the heavenly gold is not worth digging for you are not likely to discover it. often and often have I told you that the searching of the Scriptures is not the way of salvation. The Lord hath said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." But, still, the reading of the word often leads, like the hearing of it, to faith, and faith bringeth salvation; for faith cometh by hearing, and reading is a sort of hearing. While you are seeking to know what the gospel is, it may please God to bless your souls. But what poor reading some of you give to your Bibles. I do not want to say anything which is too severe because it is not strictly true—let your own consciences speak, but still, I make bold to enquire,—Do not many of you read the Bible in a very hurried way—just a little bit, and off you go? Do you not soon forget what you have read, and lose what little effect it seemed to have? How few of you are resolved to get at its soul, its juice, its life, its essence, and to drink in its meaning. Well, if you do not do that, I tell you again your reading is miserable reading, dead reading, unprofitable reading; it is not reading at all, the name would be misapplied. May the blessed Spirit give you repentance touching this thing.

II. But now, secondly, and very briefly, let us notice that IN READING WE OUGHT TO SEEK OUT THE SPIRITUAL TEACHING OF THE WORD. I think that is in my text, because our Lord says, "Have ye not read?" Then, again, "Have ye not read?" and then he says, "If ye had known what this meaneth"—and the meaning is something very spiritual. The text he quoted was, "I will have mercy, and not sacrifice"—a text out of the prophet Hosea. Now, the scribes and Pharisees were all for the letter—the sacrifice, the killing of the bullock, and so on. They overlooked the spiritual meaning of the passage, "I will have mercy, and not sacrifice"—namely, that God prefers that we should care for our fellow-creatures rather than that we should observe any ceremonial of his law, so as to cause hunger or thirst and thereby death, to any of the creatures that his hands have made. They ought to have passed beyond the outward into the spiritual, and all our readings ought to do the same.

Notice, that this should be the case when we read *the historical passages*. "Have ye not read what David did, when he was an hungered, and they that were with him; how he entered into the house of God, and did eat the shew-bread, which was not lawful for him to eat, neither for them which were with him, but only for the priests?" This was a piece of history, and they ought so to have read it as to have found spiritual instruction in it. I have heard very stupid people say, "Well, I do not care to read the historical parts of Scripture." Beloved friends, you do not know what you are talking about when you say so. I say to you now by experience that I have sometimes found even a greater depth of spirituality in the histories than I have in the Psalms. You will say, "How is that?" I assert that when you reach the inner and spiritual meaning of a history you are often surprised at the wondrous clearness—the realistic force—with which the teaching comes home to your soul. Some of the most marvelous mysteries of revelation are better understood by being set before our eyes in the histories than they are by the verbal declaration of them. When we have the statement to explain the illustration, the illustration expands and vivifies the statement. For instance, when our Lord himself would explain to us what faith was, he sent us to the history of the brazen serpent; and who that has ever read the story of the brazen serpent has not felt that he has had a better idea of faith through the picture of the dying snake-bitten persons looking to the serpent of brass and living, than from any description which even Paul has given us, wondrously as he defines

and describes. Never, I pray you, depreciate the historical portions of God's word, but when you cannot get good out of them, say, "That is my foolish head and my slow heart. o Lord, be pleased to clear my brain and cleanse my soul." When he answers that prayer you will feel that every portion of God's word is given by inspiration, and is and must be profitable to you. Cry, "open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law."

Just the same thing is true with regard to all *the ceremonial precepts*, because the Saviour goes on to say, "Have ye not read in the law, how that on the Sabbath days the priests in the temple profane the Sabbath, and are blameless?" There is not a single precept in the old law but has an inner sense and meaning; therefore do not turn away from Leviticus, or say, "I cannot read these chapters in the books of Exodus and Numbers. They are all about the tribes and their standards, the stations in the wilderness and the halts of the march, the tabernacle and furniture, or about golden knobs and bowls, and boards, and sockets, and precious stones, and blue and scarlet and fine linen." No, but look for the inner meaning. Make thorough search; for as in a king's treasure that which is the most closely locked up and the hardest to come at is the choicest jewel of the treasure, so is it with the Holy Scriptures. Did you ever go to the British Museum Library? There are many books of reference there which the reader is allowed to take down when he pleases. There are other books for which he must write a ticket, and he cannot get them without the ticket; but they have certain choice books which you will not see without a special order, and then there is an unlocking of doors, and an opening of cases, and there is a watcher with you while you make your inspection. You are scarcely allowed to put your eye on the manuscript, for fear you should blot a letter out by glancing at it; it is such a precious treasure; there is not another copy of it in all the world, and so you cannot get at it easily. Just so, there are choice and precious doctrines of God's word which are locked up in such cases as Leviticus or Solomon's Song, and you cannot get at them without a deal of unlocking of doors and the Holy Spirit himself must be with you, or else you will never come at the priceless treasure. The higher truths are as choicely hidden away as the precious regalia of princes; therefore *search* as well as read. Do not be satisfied with a ceremonial precept till you reach its spiritual meaning, for that is true reading. You have not read till you understand the spirit of the matter.

It is just the same with *the doctrinal statements* of God's word. I have sorrowfully observed some persons who are very orthodox, and who can repeat their creed very glibly, and yet the principal use that they make of their orthodoxy is to sit and watch the preacher with the view of framing a charge against him. He has uttered a single sentence which is judged to be half a hair's breadth below the standard! "That man is not sound. He said some good things, but he is rotten at the core, I am certain. He used an expression which was not eighteen ounces to the pound." Sixteen ounces to the pound are not enough for these dear brethren of whom I speak, they must have something more and over and above the shekel of the sanctuary. Their knowledge is used as a microscope to magnify trifling differences. I hesitate not to say that I have come across persons who

"Could a hair divide

Betwixt the west and north-west side,"

in matters of divinity, but who know nothing about the things of God in their real meaning. They have never drunk them into their souls, but only sucked them up into their mouths to spit them out on others. The doctrine of election is one thing, but to know that God has predestinated you, and to have the fruit of it in the good works to which you are ordained, is quite another thing.

To talk about the love of Christ, to talk about the heaven that is provided for his people, and such things—all this is very well; but this may be done without any personal acquaintance with them. Therefore, beloved, never be satisfied with a sound creed, but desire to have it graven on the tablets of your heart. The doctrines of grace are good, but the grace of the doctrines is better still. See that you have it, and be not content with the idea that you are instructed until you so understand the doctrine that you have felt its spiritual power.

This makes us feel that, in order to come to this, we shall need to feel Jesus present with us whenever we read the word. Mark that fifth verse, which I would now bring before you as part of my text which I have hitherto left out. “Have ye not read in the law, how on the Sabbath days the priests in the temple profane the Sabbath, and are blameless? But I say unto you, That in this place is one greater than the temple.” Ay, they thought much about the letter of the Word, but they did not know that *he* was there who is the Sabbath’s Master—man’s Lord and the Sabbath’s Lord, and Lord of everything. oh, when you have got hold of a creed, or of an ordinance, or anything that is outward in the letter, pray the Lord to make you feel that there is something greater than the printed book, and something better than the mere shell of the creed. There is one person greater than they all, and to him we should cry that he may be ever with us. o living Christ, make this a living word to me. Thy word is life, but not without the Holy Spirit. I may know this book of thine from beginning to end, and repeat it all from Genesis to Revelation, and yet it may be a dead book, and I may be a dead soul. But, Lord, be present here; then will I look up from the book to the Lord; from the precept to him who fulfilled it; from the law to him who honoured it; from the threatening to him who has borne it for me, and from the promise to him in whom it is “Yea and amen.” Ah, then we shall read the book so differently. He is here with me in this chamber of mine: I must not trifle. He leans over me, he puts his finger along the lines, I can see his pierced hand: I will read it as in his presence. I will read it, knowing that he is the substance of it,—that he is the proof of this book as well as the writer of it; the sum of this Scripture as well as the author of it. That is the way for true students to become wise! You will get at the soul of Scripture when you can keep Jesus with you while you are reading. Did you never hear a sermon as to which you felt that if Jesus had come into that pulpit while the man was making his oration, he would have said, “Go down, go down; what business have you here? I sent you to preach about me, and you preach about a dozen other things. Go home and learn of me, and then come and talk.” That sermon which does not lead to Christ, or of which Jesus Christ is not the top and the bottom, is a sort of sermon that will make the devils in hell to laugh, but might make the angel of God to weep, if they were capable of such emotion. You remember the story I told you of the Welshman who heard a young man preach a very fine sermon—a grand sermon, a highfaluting, spread-eagle sermon; and when he had done, he asked the Welshman what he thought of it. The man replied that he did not think anything of it. “And why not?” “Because there was no Jesus Christ in it.” “Well,” said he, “but my text did not seem to run that way.” “Never mind,” said the Welshman, “your sermon ought to run that way.” “I do not see that, however,” said the young man. “No,” said the other, “you do not see how to preach yet. This is the way to preach. From every little village in England—it does not matter where it is—there is sure to be a road to London. Though there may not be a road to certain other places, there is certain to be a road to London. Now, from every text in the Bible there is a road to Jesus Christ, and the way to preach is just to say, ‘How can I get from this text to Jesus Christ?’ and then go preaching all the way along it.” “Well, but,” said the young man, “suppose I find a text that has not got a road to Jesus Christ.” “I have preached for forty years,” said the old man, “and I have

never found such a Scripture, but if I ever do find one I will go over hedge and ditch but what I will get to him, for I will never finish without bringing in my Master." Perhaps you will think that I have gone a little over hedge and ditch to-night, but I am persuaded that I have not for the sixth verse comes in here, and brings our Lord in most sweetly, setting him in the very forefront of you Bible readers, so that you must not think of reading without feeling that he is there who is Lord and Master of everything that you are reading, and who shall make these things precious to you if you realize him in them. If you do not find Jesus in the Scriptures they will be of small service to you, for what did our Lord himself say? "Ye search the Scriptures, for in them ye think ye have eternal life, but *ye will not come unto me that ye might have life*"; and therefore your searching comes to nothing; you find no life, and remain dead in your sins. May it not be so with us?

III. Lastly, SUCH A READING OF SCRIPTURE, as implies the understanding of and the entrance into its spiritual meaning, and the discovery of the divine Person who is the spiritual meaning, IS PROFITABLE, for here our Lord says, "If ye had known what this meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice, ye would not have condemned the guiltless.~ It will save us from making a great many mistakes if we get to understand the word of God, and among other good things we shall not condemn the guiltless.

I have no time to enlarge upon these benefits, but I will just say, putting all together, that the diligent reading of the word of God with the strong resolve to get at its meaning often begets spiritual life. We are begotten by the word of God: it is the instrumental means of regeneration. Therefore love your Bibles. Keep close to your Bibles. You seeking sinners, you who are seeking the Lord, your first business is to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ; but while you are yet in darkness and in gloom, oh love your Bibles and search them! Take them to bed with you, and when you wake up in the morning, if it is too early to go downstairs and disturb the house, get half-an-hour of reading upstairs. Say, "Lord, guide me to that text which shall bless me. Help me to understand how I, a poor sinner, can be reconciled to thee." I recollect how, when I was seeking the Lord, I went to my Bible and to Baxter's "Call to the Unconverted," and to Alleine's "Alarm," and Doddridge's "Rise and Progress," for I said in myself, "I am afraid that I shall be lost but I will know the reason why. I am afraid I never shall find Christ but it shall not be for want of looking for him." That fear used to haunt me, but I said, "I will find him if he is to be found. I will read. I will think." There was never a soul that did sincerely seek for Jesus in the word but by-and-by he stumbled on the precious truth that Christ was near at hand and did not want any looking for; that he was really there, only they, poor blind creatures, were in such a maze that they could not just then see him. Oh, cling you to Scripture. Scripture is not Christ, but it is the silken clue which will lead you to him. Follow its leadings faithfully.

When you have received regeneration and a new life, keep on reading, because it will comfort you. You will see more of what the Lord has done for you. You will learn that you are redeemed, adopted, saved, sanctified. Half the errors in the world spring from people not reading their Bibles. Would anybody think that the Lord would leave any one of his dear children to perish, if he read such a text as this,—*"I give unto my sheep eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my hand"*? When I read that, I am sure of the final perseverance of the saints. Read, then, the word and it will be much for your comfort.

It will be for your nourishment, too. It is your food as well as your life. Search it and you will grow strong in the Lord and in the power of his might.

It will be for your guidance also. I am sure those go rightest who keep closest to the book. Oftentimes when you do not know what to do, you will see a text leaping up out of the book, and saying, "Follow me." I have seen a promise sometimes blaze out before my eyes, just as when an illuminated device flames forth upon a public building. One touch of flame and a sentence or a design flashes out in gas. I have seen a text of Scripture flame forth in that way to my soul; I have known that it was God's word to me, and I have gone on my way rejoicing.

And, oh, you will get a thousand helps out of that wondrous book if you do but read it; for, understanding the words more, you will prize it more, and, as you get older, the book will grow with your growth, and turn out to be a greybeard's manual of devotion just as it was aforesaid a child's sweet story book. Yes, it will always be a new book—just as new a Bible as it was printed yesterday, and nobody had ever seen a word of it till now; and yet it will be a deal more precious for all the memories which cluster round it. As we turn over its pages how sweetly do we recollect passages in our history which will never be forgotten to all eternity, but will stand for ever intertwined with gracious promises. Beloved, the Lord teach us to read his book of life which he has opened before us here below, so that we may read our titles clear in that other book of love which we have not seen as yet, but which will be opened at the last great day. The Lord be with you, and bless you.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Psalm 119:97-112.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—445, 119 (Song I.), 478.

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