EXTEMPORANEOUS PRAYER
NO. 1390

A SERMON
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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON

"So I prayed to the God of heaven."
Nehemiah 2:4

AS we have already seen in the reading of the Scripture, Nehemiah had made inquiry as to the state of the city of Jerusalem, and the tidings he heard caused him bitter grief. "Why should not my countenance be sad," he said, "when the city, the place of my fathers' sepulchres, lieth waste, and the gates thereof are consumed with fire?"

He could not endure that it should be a mere ruinous heap—that city which was once beautiful for situation, and the joy of the whole earth. Laying the matter to heart, he did not begin to speak to other people about what they would do, nor did he draw up a wonderful scheme about what might be done if so many thousand people joined in the enterprise. But it occurred to him that he would do something himself. This is just the way that practical men start a matter.

The unpractical will plan, arrange, and speculate about what may be done, but the genuine, thorough-going lover of Zion puts this question to himself, "What can you do? Nehemiah, what can you do yourself? Come, it has to be done, and you are the man that is to do it—at least, to do your share. What can you do?"

Coming so far, he resolved to set apart a time for prayer. He never had it off his mind for nearly four months. Day and night Jerusalem seemed written on his heart, as if the name were painted on his eyeballs. He could only see Jerusalem. When he slept, he dreamed about Jerusalem. When he woke, the first thought was "Poor Jerusalem!" and before he fell asleep again his evening prayer was for the ruined walls of Jerusalem.

The man of one thing, you know, is a terrible man, and when one single passion has absorbed the whole of his manhood something will be sure to come of it. Depend upon that. The desire of his heart will develop into some open demonstration, especially if he talks the matter over before God in prayer. Something did come of this. Before long, Nehemiah had an opportunity.

Men of God, if you want to serve God, and cannot find the propitious occasion, wait awhile in prayer and your opportunity will break on your path like a sunbeam. There was never a true and valiant heart that failed to find a fitting sphere somewhere or other in His service. Every diligent laborer is needed in some part of His vineyard.

You may have to linger, you may seem as if you stood in the market idle, because the Master would not engage you, but wait there in prayer, and with your heart boiling over with a warm purpose, and your chance will come. The hour will need its man, and if you are ready, you, as a man, shall not be without your hour.

God sent Nehemiah an opportunity. That opportunity came, 'tis true, in a way which he could not have expected. It came through his own sadness of heart. This matter preyed upon his mind till he began to look exceedingly unhappy. I cannot tell whether others remarked it, but the king whom he served, when he went into court with the royal goblet, noticed the distress on the cupbearer's countenance, and said to him, "Why is your countenance sad, seeing thou art not sick? This is nothing else but sorrow of heart."

Nehemiah little knew that his prayer was making the occasion for him. The prayer was registering itself upon his face. His fasting was making its marks upon his visage, and though he did not know it, he was, in that way, preparing the opportunity for himself when he went in before the king. But you see when the opportunity did come there was trouble with it, for he says, "I was very sore afraid."

You want to serve God, young man, you want to be at work. Perhaps you do not know what that work involves. It is not all pleasure. You are longing for the battle, young soldier, you have not smelt powder yet, and when you have been in a battle, and have had a few cuts, or a bullet or two have pierced you, you may not feel quite so eager for the fray.

Yet the courageous man sets those things aside, and is ready to serve his country or his sovereign, and so the courageous Christian puts all difficulty aside, and he is ready to serve his comrades and his God, cost what it may. What if I should be sore afraid? Yet so let it be, my God, if thus there shall be an opportunity to seek and to secure the welfare of Jerusalem for Your servant, who longs to promote it with all his heart.

Thus have we traced Nehemiah up to the particular point where our text concerns him. The king, Artaxerxes, having asked him why he was sad, he had an opportunity of telling him that the city of his fathers was a ruin. Thereupon the king asks him what he really wishes—by the manner of the question he would seem to imply an assurance that he means to help him.

And here we are somewhat surprised to find that, instead of promptly answering the king—the answer is not given immediately—an incident occurs, a fact is related. Though he was a man who had lately given himself up to prayer and fasting, this little parenthesis occurs—"So I prayed to the God of heaven."

My preamble leads up to this parenthesis. Upon this prayer I propose to preach. Three thoughts occur to me here, on each of which I intend to enlarge—*the fact that Nehemiah did pray just then, the manner of his prayer,* and *the excellent kind of prayer he used.*

I. THE FACT THAT NEHEMIAH PRAYED CHALLENGES ATTENTION.

He had been asked a question by his sovereign. The proper thing you would suppose was to answer it. Not so. Before he answered, he prayed to the God of heaven. I do not suppose the king noticed the pause. Probably the interval was not long enough to be noticed, but it was long enough for God to notice it—long enough for Nehemiah to have sought and have obtained guidance from God as to how to frame his answer to the king.

Are you not surprised to find a man of God having time to pray to God between a question and an answer? Yet Nehemiah found that time. We are the more astonished at his praying, because he was so evidently perturbed in mind, for, according to the second verse, he was very sore afraid.

When you are fluttered and put out you may forget to pray. Do you not, some of you, account it a valid excuse for omitting your ordinary devotion? At least, if anyone had said to you, "You did not pray when you were about that business," you would have replied, "How could I? There was a question that I was obliged to answer. I dared not hesitate. It was a king that asked it. I was in a state of confusion. I really was so distressed and terrified that I was not master of my own emotions. I hardly knew what I did. If I did not pray, surely the omission may be overlooked. I was in a state of wild alarm."

Nehemiah, however, felt that if he was alarmed it was a reason for praying, not for forgetting to pray. So habitually was he in communion with God that as soon as he found himself in a dilemma he flew away to God, just as the dove would fly to hide herself in the clefts of the rock.

His prayer was the more remarkable on this occasion, because *he must have felt very eager about his object.* The king asks him what it is he wants, and his whole heart is set upon building up Jerusalem. Are you not surprised that he did not at once say, "O king, live forever. I long to build up Jerusalem's walls. Give me all the help you can"? But no, eager as he was to pounce upon the desired object, he withdraws his hand until it is said, "So I prayed to the God of heaven."

I confess I admire him. I desire also to imitate him. I would that every Christian's heart might have just that holy caution that did not permit him to make such haste as to find ill-speed. "Prayer and

provender hinder no man's journey." Certainly, when the desire of our heart is close before us, we are anxious to seize it, but we shall be all the surer of getting the bird we spy in the bush to be a bird we grasp in the hand if we quietly pause, lift up our heart, and pray unto the God of heaven.

It is all the more surprising that he should have deliberately prayed just then, because *he had been already praying for the past three or four months* concerning the selfsame matter. Some of us would have said, "That is the thing I have been praying for, now all I have got to do is to take it and use it. Why pray any more? After all, my midnight tears and daily cries, and setting myself apart by fasting to cry unto the God of heaven, after such an anxious conference, surely at last the answer has come. What is to be done but to take the good that God provides me with and rejoice in it?"

But no, you will always find that the man who has prayed much is the man to pray more. "For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance." If you do but know the sweet art of prayer, you are the man that will be often engaged in it. If you are familiar with the mercy seat you will constantly visit it.

"For who that knows the power of prayer
But wishes to be often there?"

Although Nehemiah had been praying all this while, he nevertheless must offer another petition. "So I prayed to the God of heaven."

One thing more is worth recollecting, namely, that *he was in a king's palace*, and in the palace of a heathen king too, and he was in the very act of handing up to the king the goblet of wine. He was fulfilling his part in the state festival, I doubt not, amongst the glare of lamps, and the glitter of gold and silver, in the midst of princes and peers of the realm.

Or even if it were a private festival with the king and queen only, yet still men generally feel so impressed on such occasions with the responsibility of their high position that they are apt to forget prayer. But this devout Israelite, at such a time and in such a place, when he stands at the king's foot to hold up to him the golden goblet, refrains from answering the king's question until first he has prayed to the God of heaven.

II. There is the fact, and I think that seems to prompt further inquiry. So we pass on to observe—THE MANNER OF THIS PRAYER.

Well, very briefly, it was what we call *extemporaneous prayer*—prayer which, as it were, hurls a dart and then it is done. It was not the prayer which stands knocking at mercy's door—knock, knock, knock, but it was the concentration of many knocks into one. It was begun and completed, as it were, with one stroke. This extemporaneous prayer I desire to commend to you as among the very best forms of prayer.

Notice, how *very short* it must have been. It was introduced—slipped in—sandwiched in—between the king's question and Nehemiah's answer, and as I have already said, I do not suppose it took up any time at all that was appreciable—scarcely a second. Most likely the king never observed any kind of pause or hesitation, for Nehemiah was in such a state of alarm at the question that I am persuaded he did not allow any demur or vacillation to appear, but the prayer must have been offered like an electric flash, very rapidly indeed.

In certain states of strong excitement, it is wonderful how much the mind gets through in a short time. You may, perhaps, have dreamed, and your dream occupied, to your idea, an hour or two at the very least, yet it is probable—nay, I think certain—that all dreaming is done at the moment you wake. You never dreamed at all when you were asleep, it was just in that instant when you woke that the whole of it went through your mind.

As drowning men when rescued and recovered, have been heard to say that while they were sinking they saw the whole panorama of their lives pass before them in a few seconds, so the mind must be

capable of accomplishing much in a brief space of time. Thus the prayer was presented like the winking of an eye, it was done intuitively. Yet done it was, and it proved to be a prayer that prevailed with God.

We know, also, that it must have been *a silent prayer*, and not merely silent as to sounds but silent as to any outward signs—perfectly secret. Artaxerxes never knew that Nehemiah prayed, though he stood probably within a yard of him. He did not even move his lips as Hannah did, nor did he deem it right even to close his eyes, but the prayer was strictly within himself offered to God.

In the innermost shrine of the temple—in the holy of holies of his own secret soul—there did he pray. Short and silent was the prayer. It was a prayer on the spot. He did not go to his chamber as Daniel did, and open the window. Daniel was right, but this was a different occasion. Nehemiah could not have been permitted to retire from the palace just then.

He did not even turn his face to the wall or seek a corner of the apartment. No, but there and then, with the cup in his hand, he prayed unto the God of heaven, and then answered the question of the king.

I have no doubt from the very wording of the text that it was a *very intense and direct prayer*. He says, "So I prayed to the God of heaven." That was Nehemiah's favorite name for God—the God of heaven. He knew whom he was praying to. He did not draw a bow at a venture and shoot his prayers anyhow, but he prayed to the God of heaven—a right straight prayer to God for the thing he wanted, and his prayer sped, though it occupied less, perhaps, than a second of time.

It was a prayer of *a remarkable kind*. I know it was so, because Nehemiah never forgot that he did pray it. I have prayed hundreds of times, and thousands of times, and not recollected any minute particular afterwards either as to the occasion that prompted or the emotions that excited me. But there are one or two prayers in my life that I can never forget. I have not jotted them down in a diary, but I remember when I prayed, because the time was so special, and the prayer was so intense, and the answer to it was so remarkable.

Now, Nehemiah's prayer was never, never erased from his memory, and when these words of history were written down he wrote that down, "So I prayed to the God of heaven"—a little bit of a prayer pushed in edgeways between a question and an answer—a mere fragment of devotion, as it seemed, and yet so important that it is put down in a historical document as a part of the history of the restitution and rebuilding of the city of Jerusalem, and a link in the circumstances which led up to that event of the most important character.

Nehemiah felt it to be so, and therefore he notes the record—"So I prayed to the God of heaven."

III. Now, beloved friends, I come, in the third place, to recommend to you THIS EXCELLENT STYLE OF PRAYING.

I shall speak to the children of God mainly, to you that have faith in God. I beg you often, nay, I would ask you always to use this method of extemporaneous prayer. And I would to God, also, that some here who have never prayed before would offer an extemporaneous prayer to the God of heaven before they leave this house—that a short but fervent petition, something like that of the publican in the temple, might go up from you—"God be merciful to me a sinner."

To deal with this matter practically, then, *it is the duty and privilege of every Christian to have set times of prayer*. I cannot understand a man's keeping up the vitality of godliness unless he regularly retires for prayer, morning and evening at the very least. Daniel prayed three times a day, and David says, "Seven times a day will I praise thee." It is good for your hearts, good for your memory, good for your moral consistency that you should hedge about certain portions of time and say, "These belong to God. I shall do business with God at such and such a time, and try to be as punctual to my hours with Him as I should be if I made an engagement to meet a friend."

When Sir Thomas Abney was Lord Mayor of London, the banquet, somewhat troubled him, for Sir Thomas always had prayer with his family at a certain time. The difficulty was how to quit the banquet to keep up family devotion, but so important did he consider it that he vacated his chair, saying to a person near that he had a special engagement with a dear friend which he must keep. And he did keep it,

and returned again to his place, none of the company being the wiser, but he himself being all the better for observing his wonted habit of worship.

Mrs. Rowe used to say that when her time came for prayer she would not give it up if the apostle Paul were preaching. "Nay," she said, "if all the twelve apostles were there, and could be heard at no other time, she would not absent herself from her closet when the set time came round."

Well, I do not feel very sure that my scruples would go quite so far, for, I think, if I had the opportunity of hearing the apostle at the time when I am wont to pray, and could not at any other time hear him, I should postpone my prayer to hear the sermon, nor would there be any impropriety in the arrangement, probably it would show a little shrewd sense. Yet, as a general principle, it is desirable to be punctual and punctilious in respect to your private as well as your public devotions. Be not negligent, but vigilant, never remiss, but always regular in keeping up your appointed seasons of prayer.

But now, having urged the importance of such habitual piety, I want to impress on you the value of another sort of prayer, namely, *the short, brief, quick, frequent extempore prayer* of which Nehemiah gives us a specimen. And I recommend this because it hinders no engagement and occupies no time. You may be measuring off your calicoes, or weighing your groceries, or you may be casting up an account, and between the items you may say, "Lord, help me." You may breathe a prayer to heaven and say, "Lord, keep me." It will take no time.

It is one great advantage to persons who are hard pressed in business that such prayers as these will not, in the slightest degree, incapacitate them from attending to the business they may have in hand. It requires you to go to no particular place. You can stand where you are, ride in a cab, walk along the streets, be the bottom sawyer in a saw pit, or the top one either, and yet pray just as well such prayers as these.

No altar, no church, no so-called sacred place is needed, but wherever you are, just a little prayer as that will reach the ear of God, and win a blessing. Such a prayer as that can be offered anywhere, under any circumstances.

I do not know in what condition a man could be in which he might not offer some such prayer as that. On the land, or on the sea, in sickness or in health, amidst losses or gains, great reverses or good returns, still might he breathe his soul in short, quick sentences to God. The advantage of such a way of praying is that you can pray often and pray always.

If you must prolong your prayer for a quarter of an hour, you might possibly be unable to spare the time, but if it only wants a quarter of a minute, why, then, it may come again and again and again and again—a hundred times a day. The habit of prayer is blessed, but the spirit of prayer is better, and the spirit of prayer it is which is the mother of these extemporary prayers, and therefore do I like them, because she is a plentiful mother. Many times in a day may we speak with the Lord our God.

Such prayer may be suggested by all sorts of surroundings. I recollect a poor man once paying me a compliment which I highly valued at the time. He was lying in a hospital, and when I called to see him he said, "I heard you for some years, and now whatever I look at seems to remind me of something or other that you said, and it comes back to me as fresh as when I first heard it."

Well, now, he that knows how to pray extemporary prayers will find everything about him helping him to the sacred habit. Is it a beautiful landscape? Say, "Blessed be God who has strewn these treasures of form and color through the world, to cheer the sight and gladden the heart."

Are you in doleful darkness, and is it a foggy day? Say, "Lighten my darkness, O Lord." Are you in the midst of company? You will be reminded to pray, "Lord, keep the door of my lips." Are you quite alone? Then you can say, "Let me not be alone, but be Thou with me, Father." The putting on of your clothes, the sitting at the breakfast table, the getting into the conveyance, the walking the streets, the opening of your ledger, the putting up of your shutters—everything may suggest such prayer as that which I am trying to describe if you are but in the right frame of mind for offering it.

These prayers are commendable *because they are truly spiritual*. Wordy prayers may also be windy prayers. There is much of praying by book that has nothing whatever to recommend it. When you have

found the benefit of a manual of French conversation to anyone travelling in France without a knowledge of the language, then try how much good a manual of prayers will do a poor soul who does not know how to ask our heavenly Father for a boon or benefit that he needs.

A manual, a handbook, forsooth! Tush! Pray with your heart, not with your hands. Or if you would lift hands in prayer, let them be your own hands, not another man's. The prayers that come leaping out of the soul—the gust of strong emotion, fervent desire, lively faith—these are the truly spiritual, and no prayers but spiritual prayers will God accept.

This kind of prayer is free from any suspicion that it is prompted by the corrupt motive of being offered to please men. They cannot say that the secret brief silent prayers of our soul are presented with any view to our own praise, for no man knows that we are praying at all. Therefore do I commend such prayers to you, and hope that you may abound therein.

There have been hypocrites that have prayed by the hour. I doubt not there are hypocrites as regular at their devotions as the angels are before the throne of God, and yet is there no life, no spirit, no acceptance in their pretentious homage. But he that prays extemporary prayers—whose heart talks with God—he is no hypocrite. There is a reality, and force, and life about it. If I see sparks come out of a chimney I know there is a fire inside somewhere, and extemporaneous prayers are like the sparks that fly from a soul that is filled with burning coals of love to Jesus Christ.

Short, extempore prayers are of great use to us, dear friends. Oftentimes they check us. Bad-tempered people, if you were always to pray just a little before you let angry expressions fly from your lips, why many times you would not say those naughty words at all.

They advised a good woman to take a glass of water and hold some of it in her mouth five minutes before she scolded her husband. I dare say it was not a bad receipt, but if, instead of practicing that little eccentricity, she would just breathe a short prayer to God, it would certainly be more effectual, and far more Scriptural.

I can recommend it as a valuable prescription for the hasty and the peevish, for all who are quick to take offense, and slow to forgive insult or injury. When in business you are about to close in with an offer about the propriety of which you have a little doubt, or a positive scruple, such a prayer as, "Guide me, good Lord" would often keep you back from doing what you will afterwards regret.

The habit of offering these brief prayers would also check your confidence in yourself. It would show your dependence upon God. It would keep you from getting worldly. It would be like sweet perfume burnt in the chamber of your soul to keep away the fever of the world from your heart. I can strongly recommend these short, sweet, blessed prayers. May the Holy Ghost give them to you!

Besides, they *actually bring us blessings from heaven*. Extemporaneous prayers, as in the case of Eliezer, the servant of Abraham, as in the case of Jacob when he said even in dying, "I have waited for thy salvation, O God"—prayers such as Moses offered when we do not read that he prayed at all, and yet God said to him, Why cryest thou unto me. Extemporaneous prayers such as David frequently presented, these were all successful with the Most High. Therefore abound in them, for God loves to encourage and to answer them.

I might thus keep on recommending extemporaneous prayer, but I will say only one more thing in its favor. I believe it is very suitable to some persons of a peculiar temperament who could not pray for a long time to save their lives. Their minds are rapid and quick. Well, dear friends, time is not an element in the business, God does not hear us because of the length of our prayer, but because of the sincerity of it.

Prayer is not to be measured by the yard, nor weighed by the pound. It is the might and force of it—the truth and reality of it—the energy and the intensity of it. You that are either of so little a mind or of so quick a mind that you cannot use many words, or continue long to think of one thing, it should be to your comfort that extempore prayers are acceptable.

And it may be dear friend that you are in a condition of body in which you cannot pray any other way. A headache such as some people are frequently affected with the major part of their lives—a state

of body which the physician can explain to you—might prevent the mind from concentrating itself long upon one subject. Then it is refreshing to be able again and again and again—fifty or a hundred times a day—to address one's self to God in short, quick sentences, the soul being all on fire. This is a blessed style of praying.

Now, I conclude by mentioning a few of the times *when* I think we ought to resort to this practice of extemporaneous prayer. Mr. Rowland Hill was a remarkable man for the depth of his piety, but when I asked at Wotton-under-Edge for his study, though I rather pressed the question, I did not obtain a satisfactory reply.

At length the good minister said, "The fact is, we never found any. Mr. Hill used to study in the garden, in the parlor, in the bedroom, in the streets, in the woods, anywhere." "But where did he retire for prayer?" They said they supposed it was in his chamber, but that he was always praying—that it did not matter where he was, the good old man was always praying. It seemed as if his whole life, though he spent it in the midst of his fellow-men doing good, was passed in perpetual prayer.

You know the story of his being over there in Walworth at Mr. George Clayton's chapel, where our brother Paul Turquand now is the pastor, and of his being seen in the aisles after everybody was gone, while he was waiting for his coachman. There was the old man toddling up and down the aisles, and as someone listened, he heard him singing to himself—

"And when I shall die, receive me I'll cry,
For Jesus has loved me, I cannot tell why;
But this thing I find, we two are so joined,
He won't be in heaven and leave me behind."

And with such rhymes and ditties, and choice words, he would occupy every moment of his life. He has been known to stand in the Blackfriars' road with his hands under his coat tails, looking in a shop window, and if you listened you might soon perceive that he was breathing out his soul before God. He had got into a constant state of prayer. I believe it is the best condition in which a man can be—praying always, praying without ceasing, always drawing near to God with these extemporaneous prayers.

But if I must give you a selection of suitable times I should mention such as these. Whenever you have a great joy, cry, "Lord, make this a real blessing to me." Do not exclaim with others, "Am I not a lucky fellow?" but say, "Lord, give me more grace, and more gratitude, now that You do multiply Your favors."

When you have got any arduous undertaking on hand, or a heavy piece of business, do not touch it till you have breathed your soul out in a short prayer. When you have a difficulty before you, and you are seriously perplexed, when business has got into a tangle or a confusion which you cannot unravel or arrange, breathe a prayer. It need not occupy a minute, but it is wonderful how many snarls come loose after just a word of prayer.

Are the children particularly troublesome to you, good woman? Do you seem as if your patience was almost worn out with the worry and harass? Now for an extempore prayer. You will manage them all the better, and you will bear with their naughty tempers all the more quietly. At any rate your own mind will be the less ruffled.

Do you think that there is a temptation before you? Do you begin to suspect that somebody is plotting against you? Now for a prayer, "Lead me in a plain path because of mine enemies." Are you at work at the bench, or in a shop, or a warehouse, where lewd conversation and shameful blasphemies assail your ears? Now for a short prayer.

Have you noticed some sin that grieves you? Let it move you to prayer. These things ought to remind you to pray. I believe the devil would not let people swear so much if Christian people always prayed every time they heard an oath. He would then see it did not pay. Their blasphemies might somewhat be hushed if they provoked us to supplication.

Do you feel your own heart going off the lines? Does sin begin to fascinate you? Now for a prayer—a warm, earnest, passionate cry, "Lord, hold thou me up!"

Did you see something with your eye, and did that eye infect your heart? Do you feel as if "your feet were almost gone, and your steps had well-nigh slipped?" Now for a prayer—"Hold me, Lord, by my right hand."

Has something quite unlooked-for happened? Has a friend treated you badly? Then, like David, say, "Lord, put to nought the counsel of Ahithophel." Breathe a prayer now. Are you anxious to do some good? Be sure to have prayer over it.

Do you mean to speak to that young man as he goes out of the Tabernacle tonight about his soul? Pray first, brother. Do you mean to address yourself to the members of your class and write them a letter this week about their spiritual welfare? Pray over every line, brothers.

It is always good to have praying going on while you are talking about Christ. I always find I can preach better if I can pray while I am preaching. And the mind is very remarkable in its activities. It can be praying while it is studying. It can be looking up to God while it is talking to man. And there can be one hand held up to receive supplies from God while the other hand is dealing out the same supplies which He is pleased to give.

Pray as long as you live. Pray when you are in great pain, the sharper the pang then the more urgent and persistent should your cry to God be. And when the shadow of death gathers round you, and strange feelings flush or chill you, and plainly tell that you near the journey's end, then pray.

Oh! that is a time for extempore prayer. Short and pithy prayers like this—"Hide not thy face from me, O Lord," or this, "Be not far from me, O God," will doubtless suit you. "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit," were the thrilling words of Stephen in his extremity. And "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit," were the words that your Master Himself uttered just before He bowed His head and gave up the ghost. You may well take up the same strain and imitate Him.

These thoughts and counsels are so exclusively addressed to the saints and faithful brethren in Christ that you will be prone to ask, "Is not there anything to be said to the unconverted?" Well, whatever has been spoken in their hearing may be used by them for their own benefit. But let me address myself to you, my dear friends, as pointedly as I can.

Though you are not saved, yet you must not say, "I cannot pray." Why, if prayer is thus simple, what excuse can you have for neglecting it? It wants no measurable space of time. Such prayers as these God will hear, and you have all of you the ability and opportunity to think and to express them, if you have only that elementary faith in God which believes "that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him."

Cornelius had, I suppose, got about as far as this, when he was admonished by the angel to send for Peter, who preached to him peace by Jesus Christ to the conversion of his soul. Is there such a strange being in the Tabernacle tonight as a man or woman that never prays? How shall I expostulate with you?

May I steal a passage from a living poet who, though he has contributed nothing to our hymn books, hums a note so suited to my purpose, and so pleasant to my ear, that I like to quote it—

"More things are wrought by prayer
Than this world dreams of. Wherefore let thy voice
Rise like a fountain, flowing night and day:
For what are men better than sheep or goats,
That nourish a blind life within the brain,
If, knowing God, they lift not hands of prayer,
Both for themselves and those who call them friend?
For so the whole round world is every way
Bound by gold chains about the feet of God."

I do not suspect there is a creature here who never prays, because people generally pray to somebody or other. The man, that never prays to God such prayers as he ought, prays to God such prayers as he ought not. It is an awful thing when a man asks God to damn him, and yet there are persons that do that.

Suppose He were to hear you, He is a prayer-hearing God. If I address one profane swearer here I would like to put this matter clearly to him. Were the Almighty to hear you. If your eyes were blinded and your tongue was struck dumb while you were uttering a wild imprecation, how would you bear the sudden judgment on your impious speech?

If some of those prayers of yours were answered for yourself, and some that you have offered in your passion for your wife and for your child, were fulfilled to their hurt and your distraction, what an awful thing it would be. Well, God does answer prayer, and one of these days He may answer your prayers to your shame and everlasting confusion.

Would not it be well now, before you leave your seat, to pray, "Lord, have mercy upon me. Lord, save me. Lord, change my heart. Lord, give me to believe in Christ. Lord, give me now an interest in the precious blood of Jesus. Lord, save me now"? Will not each one of you breathe such a prayer as that? May the Holy Spirit lead you so to do, and if you once begin to pray aright I am not afraid that you will ever leave off, for there is a something that holds the soul fast in real prayer.

Sham prayers—what is the good of them? But real heart pleading—the soul talking with God—when it once begins will never cease. You will have to pray till you exchange prayer for praise, and go from the mercy seat below to the throne of God above.

May God bless you all. All of you, I say. All who are my kindred in Christ, and all for whose salvation I yearn. God bless you all and every one, for our dear Redeemer's sake. Amen

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—NEHEMIAH 1 AND 2:1-8

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—181, 636, 978

Taken from The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit C. H. Spurgeon Collection. Only necessary changes have been made, such as correcting spelling errors, some punctuation usage, capitalization of deity pronouns, and minimal updating of a few archaic words. The content is unabridged. Additional Bible-based resources are available at www.spurgeongems.org.

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