

CONSTANT, INSTANT, EXPECTANT NO. 1480

A SERMON
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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 effective 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 unless they are 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 remedy 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 The Lord had withdrawn the light of His countenance from him and therefore this man of God slipped from under the chain to have a few minutes alone with God.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 into 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 lifeblood 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, and 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 You.” Master Brooks says 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 dishonoring to God than honoring 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 has all his mind as well as all his body occupied with the desire to overthrow his antagonist. Now he bends and twists and then he strains and stretches—now he uses one foot and then another. He tries his arm and now his leg. He shifts his ground. He takes up another position and he keeps his eye perpetually open lest he should be caught unawares. He has 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 you. The whole of your mind, your memory, your judgment, your affection, your hopes, your fears and even your imagination must be concentrated upon this labor of prayer. May the Holy Spirit work in you this comprehensive ardor, 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 suffers 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 awakened his slumbering friend. We are exhorted to be persistent 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 effect of a cause which has existed long before. We are to be as persistent 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 loathe our prayers? See how we deal with our fellow men—if they ask a favor 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 does God in His mercy yield to the entreaties of His people. As one has very prettily said, the nurse when she has her child in the cradle, though it begins to cry and whinny a little, she leaves it and continues at her household work and when it cries a little more and a little more, she still listens, but she lets it be where it is. But when at last the baby takes to vehement crying, then straightway she presses it to her bosom with many a kiss and 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 necessary. 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 do this.

Whatever it is that you are asking for, it is no trifle. Look at it. If it is a thing about which you are not certain that it would be according to God’s mind, lay it aside—you have no right to be very fervent

about that which is of questionable necessity. If this may or may not be good for you, put up your requests to the great Father gently once or twice, and then lay them lightly in Jesus' hands; and when you are certain that the blessing sought for is a good and necessary thing for your soul, then in order that your spirit may be strong in prayer, get a deep sense of its value, its goodness, and its necessity. Examine it as a goldsmith inspects a jewel when he wishes to estimate its worth. A man's ardor in pursuit will be in proportion to his consciousness of the value of that which he pursues. Pray that you may feel what a precious thing grace is, what it cost the Lord to bring it to you, what blessings it brings with it for time and for eternity. And when your heart sees that it seeks after an unspeakably precious gift, then will its desire be stirred up to pray with intense longings.

When you have done this, meditate much upon your necessities that you may *get a sense of your need of the mercy you are seeking*. Look at your soul's poverty and your own undeservingness. Look at what will happen to you unless this blessing comes. If it is some absolutely indispensable spiritual blessing, picture to yourself where you will be if God should withhold it—what evils will spring of your continuing in want of it and what further needs may yet beset you. The more your need smites you, the more eagerly will you cry unto the Lord concerning it. Are you desirous of bread for your soul? Be hungry and let your hunger eat into your heart. Are you desirous of the water of life? Be thirsty and let your thirst burn you till you are dried up like a potsherd. Let your necessities have liberty, by meditation, to seize you and to distress you with a sense of your 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 a consciousness of where and what you are apart from Christ and from the mercy of God and then, when you perceive well your need, this, with a sense of the greatness of the blessing, will much quicken you as to instancy in prayer.

Endeavor, also, to *get a distinct consciousness of the fact that God must give you this blessing or you will never have it*. It requires time to think over these things, therefore set yourself apart awhile from all other occupations and think on these matters. Say to yourself—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. 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 gift of undeserved favor. Oh, if you get that truth well worked into your soul, you will pray earnestly and you will use the right arguments, "Have mercy upon me, O God, according to Your loving-kindness, according unto the multitude of Your tender mercies." God alone can help you and if He refuses, you are undone forever, therefore cry mightily unto Him.

Further to make you instant in prayer *endeavor eagerly to desire the good thing*. Stand not before God, if you would win at His hands, as one who will be content whether or not you receive the blessing. Say not, "Give it or withhold it—it is all the same to me. I knock at Your door and if You open, I will be somewhat pleased, but if Your door is 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 known 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 You go unless You 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 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 vehe-

mence must be manifested. A certain person is mentioned in John Bunyan's, "Holy War," whose name is Mr. Desiresawake, a very capital fellow. Cultivate his acquaintance! Alas, there are some who live next door to Mr. Desiresasleep and their prayers are dormant like certain wild beasts in winter. Gladly 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 sends down His angel to strengthen them or in some way hears 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 brethren 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 is a matter of promise or no. Take down the Bible, your charter and your Father's will, and see if there is 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 prayer is as Luther calls it, "bombards Christianorum," the Christian's great gun with which he does bombard heaven, then surely the promise is the shot which he sends forth. Plead the promise by saying, "Lord, do as You have said. Fulfill this word unto Your servant upon which You have 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 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 Your name's sake; for Your truth's sake; for Your covenant's sake." And then come in with the greatest plea of all, "For Jesus' sake and in His name. For the blood's sake, I plead with You, my God. O You that hear prayer, will You not keep touch with Your own Word and be true to Your own Son?" You have prevailed there. By that sign you have conquered. Again it shall be seen that the Lord has listened 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 there is real commerce between your soul and God 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 does He bless them—but with it He does 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 word, 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 is the Christian's vital breath, how can he leave off praying?

We must maintain the ardor of prayer. We must be intense always. Prayer is not to be a thing of yesterday, but of today and tomorrow until it changes into praise above. Perhaps prayer will continue even in heaven. Certainly the souls under the altar cry, "How long?" And unfulfilled prophecies and promises 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 helps our infirmities." Now then, brethren, that we may be helped to keep up our fervency in prayer, please notice that prayer must be continuous because *it is so singularly mixed up 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 near unto God with their petitions perpetually. The whole church, like the 12 tribes, is instantly serving God day and night in prayer, hoping for the fulfillment of the promise of the glorious appearing. "Behold, he prays," 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 has this condition of prayer appended, "Ask of Me, and I will give You the heathen for Your inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for Your possession." Prayer is the atmosphere which surrounds Emanuel's land—as the clouds hang on the mountains, so does prayer linger over every great mercy of God.

Prayer is connected with every covenant blessing. Why, beloved, it is to him that calls 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 your 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 splendor—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 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? Does not nature itself teach us that in the 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 you not that your bodies are the temples of the Holy Spirit? Wherever you go, you carry your temples with you and in every place you may pray and should pray and need to pray 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 especially we ought to be constant in prayer, because *such remarkable gifts are vouchsafed to persistence*. 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 cargos and will come home freighted with all the best 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 never faint. Wait then upon the Lord with holy persistence of prayer and your reward shall more than repay you. It is good for us to be compelled to pray like this. It exercises the faculties of the soul. It makes men of us. It brings us up from spiritual childhood to perfect manhood. Therefore, be constant in prayer and gather strength for persistent pleading.

No reason can be given why we should not continue in instant prayer. I can suppose one brother saying, “I feel I cannot pray.” When you feel you cannot pray, you can 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 favorable 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, “makes intercession for us with groans 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 for 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 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 fishermen at Mentone keep on fishing with their great nets—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! So 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 unto You?”

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—not trading. And so it is in pray-

er—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 at 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 constantly, 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 wings bear 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 before 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 many aspects and is a better test of a Christian, but 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 is EXPECTANT. It is not in the text verbally, but it must be there 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 is close upon it. There is no praying with any fervor 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 is the very reason of prayer. Some prefer to pray because it is their duty and their custom, but real prayer usually springs from the 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. But I was soon aroused by the repetition of the same sharp sound. 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 someone. 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, You have 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 You to hear us. When You do hear us, we bless You, but we are not *surprised* as though it were a strange thing. Your truth causes great admiration but no astonishment, for it is like You to keep Your word. We are poor dependent children and You a wise and tender Father. You have never left us and you will never leave us and so we continue instant in prayer because we are expectant of Your grace. Some professors

seldom exercise expectancy in prayer, but the soul of prayer is gone when you have no expectation. God will hear 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 is by some extraordinary mercy beyond what is promised. His usual way is to raise our expectations so that we look for the favor and then He sends it. If some people looked 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 relieved. 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, “You say, ‘Your kingdom come.’ Arise and help to make My kingdom come! You ask that My name may be hallowed. Go, yourself, 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 to you, but you 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 Your grace! Give me grace to ask for Your grace. Give me grace to receive your grace! And when in Your grace You have given me grace, give me grace to use Your grace!” See you 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.**

C. H. SPURGEON

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