"BEHOLD, HE PRAYETH"

NO. 1860

A SERMON
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BY C. H. SPURGEON
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"Enquire in the house of Judas for one called Saul, of Tarsus: for, behold, he prayeth."
Acts 9:11

THESE words are the hallmark of genuine conversion. "Behold, he prayeth" is a surer witness of a man's conversion than, "Behold, he sings," or "Behold, he reads the Scripture," or "Behold, he preacheth." These things may be admirably done by men who are not regenerate, but if, in God's sense of the term, a man really *prays*, we may know of a surety that he has passed from death unto life.

True prayer is a sure evidence of spiritual quickening. The Holy Ghost has put spiritual life into the heart of the man who prays, for prayer is the breath of heavenly life. Prayer is the outcome of that sense of need which arises from the new life. A man would not pray to God if he did not feel that he had urgent need of blessings which only the Lord can bestow.

While expressing his sense of need, and appealing to God for help, the praying man gives evidence of being at peace with his Lord, and cured of his natural alienation. He who prays trusts, and thus reveals the faith which saves. Some forms of prayer display great faith, but all real prayer is the working of faith, either little or great.

Will a man cry to God for mercy if he does not believe in Him? Will he plead at the mercy seat if he does not expect to obtain his desire? Thus, dear friends, prayer of the true kind is a voucher for the existence of spiritual life in its consciousness of need, in its turning towards God, and in its faith in Him. Prayer is the autograph of the Holy Ghost upon the renewed heart.

Prayer is also an admirable form of communion with God, and as the carnal mind can have no fellowship with God, it becomes the token of regeneration, the evidence of adoption. He that prays has some knowledge of God, some acquaintance with the great Invisible. The habit of private prayer, and the constant practice of heart-fellowship with the Most High, are the surest indicators of the work of the Holy Spirit upon the heart.

When it can be said of a man, "Behold, he prayeth," the seal of the great King is upon him, he bears the endorsement of the Searcher of hearts. Hence the Lord gave to Ananias this sure indication that Saul of Tarsus was a converted man, by saying to him, "Behold, he prayeth."

In Saul's case, this indication was very specially remarkable, "Behold, he prayeth" had a peculiar meaning in relation to this converted Pharisee. I shall have to show you this at length. It was thought a great wonder that king Saul, of the Old Testament, prophesied. So unexpected and singular was the event that it became a proverb, "Is Saul also among the prophets?"

But it was an equal marvel when this more modern Saul was seen to pray. Is Saul of Tarsus among those who pray to Jesus for mercy? The Lord from heaven Himself mentions it as a prodigy! He points to it as a thing to be beheld and wondered at, for He says to His servant Ananias, "Behold, he prayeth."

I. We will begin our discourse with the following observation—this expression concerning Saul of Tarsus is remarkable, for IT IMPLIES THAT HE HAD NEVER PRAYED BEFORE. "Behold, he prayeth" could hardly be spoken of one who had been accustomed to pray in former days.

This is very striking, for Saul was a Pharisee, and therefore a man who habitually repeated prayers. Pharisees boasted of the regularity, number, and length of their prayers. Perhaps there had never been a day in Saul's life from the time in which he was conscious in which he had not gone through his prayers.

Many devout Jews spent nine hours a day in prayer, for they occupied an hour in actual supplication, and sat still for an hour before and an hour after prayer—and this was done three times a day. Pharisees offered prayer, not only in the temple and in the synagogue, but even at the corners of the streets where they could be seen of men.

Whatever the quality of their praying might be, there was plenty of it in quantity. If any fact was in public evidence so that nobody could deny it, it was that Saul of Tarsus had been much in prayer. And therefore it is the more striking that the Lord Himself should say to Ananias, concerning this constantly devout Pharisee, "Behold, he prayeth."

Behold how the Lord revises the judgments of men. In the opinion of all who knew Saul of Tarsus, the disciple of Gamaliel, he was much given to prayer. But He who searches the hearts, and knew Saul well, and knew truthfully what prayer is, here declares that now at length he begins to pray. Despite all his former superfluity of ostentatious devotion, Saul all his life long had never prayed at all. And what his friends would have put down as a great mass of prayer, the Lord here makes nothing of. Until the first broken-hearted confession of sin came from the poor blinded persecutor of Jesus, the Lord considered that he had never prayed.

I want to push this fact home upon some who are present with us this morning. I mean those who in a formal manner have always prayed, and yet have never spiritually prayed. Your mother taught you a form of prayer—this form you repeated all through your childhood and your youth. At this moment you are most regular in bowing the knee, both morning and evening—and yet no single prayer may ever have risen from your heart to the heart of God.

You go constantly to your place of worship, you are diligently observant of every Christian ordinance, you join in the responses, or you bow your head and listen in silence to the extemporary utterance of your minister, and therefore you suppose that you pray—and yet it may be a vain supposition. If anyone were to say that you had not prayed, you would be very angry, and yet it is possible that such a statement would be strictly true.

How much I long that today, for the first time, you may in real earnest cry unto the Lord God, and cause Him to bear witness that now indeed you pray! You will then think little of all your heartless repetitions of prayers, and you will cry to God for the Holy Spirit who helps our infirmities, since we know not what we should pray for as we ought.

I have told you that the Pharisees were noted for their prayers, and therefore it seems the more singular that the Lord should announce that Saul of Tarsus had now begun to pray. Yet it was so. He was now offering his first *real* prayer.

That prayer of the Pharisee, which we read just now from the eighteenth chapter of Luke, was meant for prayer, but there is not a particle of prayer in it. He did not ask for anything, he did not confess a necessity, nor plead a promise. He did not seek mercy, nor mention propitiation. His formal thanksgiving was stained with proud self-esteem, and it was more the boast of vanity than the request of humility.

Much of what is called prayer is the husk, and not the kernel of prayer. Suppose you take the best form that was ever written, and you go through that in the most orderly style. You may do that, and continue to do it, throughout a life of seventy years, and yet you may never have sought God in real earnest.

If you prefer to compose your own prayers you may do so throughout life, and you may make prayers which shall be excellent in language, and you may even make a new one every morning and every evening. And yet there may not have been a single atom of true supplication in the whole round of pious effusions.

What if your first prayer has yet to be prayed? What a solemn suggestion to you who have been nursed in the lap of piety, and wrapped in the garments of religion! I do not wonder that it cuts you to the quick. This heart-searching inquiry ought not to be thrust aside as if it did not concern you. Unless your heart speaks to God, unless your soul comes into spiritual contact with the great Father of Spirits, your form of prayer, whether it is liturgical or extemporaneous, is little worth.

God is not the God of the dead, but of the living, and this applies to prayers as well as men.

"God abhors the sacrifice
Where not the heart is found."

One sentence of true heart-pleading, such as, "God be merciful to me a sinner," is worth volumes of mere lip-service.

Real prayer must be *spiritual*, and Saul's prayers had not been such before. Words are but the body of devotion—the confession of sin, the longing for mercy, the groaning for grace—these are the soul and spirit of prayer. A man may have repeated the choicest words, and these may have been the outward embodiment of true prayer, because his heart went with them.

But on the other hand, he may have used equally select expressions, and may not have prayed at all. For there may have been in him no stirring of the heart towards God. A man may utter no word whatever, he may sit in absolute silence, and he may be praying most effectually.

Moses cried aloud when he said not a word, and Hannah was heard in the temple when she made no sound, but only her lips moved. I reckon that those prayers which cannot be expressed in language are often the most deep and fervent. When desires are so weighty, that they burden our words and even crush them down, then are they most prevalent with God. There is power in that solemn silence which is "frost of the mouth, but thaw of the mind," when the soul flows with strong current in a deep and hidden bed till it reaches the heart of God, and prevails with Him.

Anyhow, that prayer which is not spiritual is not reckoned of the Lord to be prayer at all, for "God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth." You may, if you like, praise God with organs, as the English do, or you may pray to God with windmills, as the Tartars do—the things are very much alike, as I believe—but your praising and your praying will not be measured by the heaving of the bellows, nor by the revolution of the sails. They will be measured only by the heart-work which was in them.

If the spirit does not commune with God, there has been no prayer. There may have been music and oratory, but there has been no prayer if the spiritual nature has not spoken with the Father of Spirits. Notice, then, that we only begin to pray when we begin to live spiritual lives.

Next to this, Saul had never prayed a single *right* prayer of the kind which the Lord can accept. Saul hitherto had not known the Lord Jesus, and therefore he did not know the way of access to the Father through His Son, whom He has appointed Mediator. Saul knew the letter of the truth according to the ceremonial law, but he did not know the spirit of it as it is embodied in Jesus. He had been going about to establish his own righteousness, but he had not submitted himself to the righteousness of Christ—and therefore in his prayer he had not been traversing the road which led to the heart of God.

If a man were using his rifle at Wimbledon in a contest for a prize, if he were told, "It is not that target on the right, but this upon the left which must be aimed at." If he would continue to shoot towards the right, even though he should make a center, yet he would not have scored. Inasmuch as that was not the target appointed in the competition, his best shots would count for nothing.

When a man does not pray in the Lord's appointed way, nor through Jesus Christ, nor in dependence upon the Holy Spirit, he does not pray at all. However fine his prayer, it is only a splendid sin. If you employ a servant to do a work, and he obstinately persists in doing another thing, he will not earn his wages. However industriously he works at what you have never set him to do, he will receive nothing at your hands.

So if you pray to God in a way which God has never ordained, if you refuse to use the name which He has appointed, if you neglect the cultivation of that holy and humble spirit which the Lord will alone accept, you may pray till your tongue cleaves to the roof of your mouth, but in God's judgment you have not prayed at all, and you will not receive anything of the Lord.

It is certain, too, that Saul of Tarsus had never made mention of *the name of Jesus* in his prayers, and therefore God reckoned that he had not prayed. He had heard of Jesus, but he had rejected His claims and hated His people. Our heavenly Father never turns a deaf ear to the name of Jesus when it is honestly pleaded. But He will not hear us if we despise that ever-blessed name.

There is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved. There is none other name by which we can hopefully approach the mercy seat. Saul had rejected that name, and had come in his own name, and therefore he had not prayed at all.

Suppose a king should make a rule that every petition that was presented to him should bear a certain stamp, which his representative would freely put upon it. Then if a man neglected or refused to have his petition thus endorsed, he could not wonder if his petitions were treated as impertinences and returned unanswered. Virtually, such a man has sent in no petition whatever, since he has declined to comply with the regulation without which no petition can be received.

Friends, let us see to it that we most humbly and heartily in our prayers plead the precious blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. For the force of prayer lies mainly in our pleading the name and work of the well-beloved Son of God. We must set ourselves on one side, and hide ourselves behind the Lord Jesus. For we and our prayers can only be accepted in the Beloved—through the person, the merit, the sacrifice, the ever-living intercession of the Lord Jesus Christ. If we have not prayed in the name of Jesus, we have not prayed at all.

Furthermore, I should like you to notice that real prayer cannot come from men whose *characters* are contrary to the mind of God. He whose character contradicts his prayer has not prayed. His life has effectually pleaded against his lips. Saul of Tarsus was opposed to the Son of God—how could he be in favor with God Himself? He did not believe the Gospel, though the seal of God was on it—how, then, could God receive his prayer?

How shall the Lord listen to us if we will not listen to Him? How shall God accept us if we will not accept His Son? If we set ourselves in opposition to His Gospel, do we not shut the door of mercy in our own faces? While we pretend to be knocking at heaven's gate, we are turning the key against ourselves.

Saul had been more than an opposer, he had become a persecutor. Can persecutors enjoy the favor of God? Can we hope for God's blessing while we are cursing God's people? How can a persecutor pray? Saul of Tarsus was evidently full of hate and cruelty—how could he pray? Love is the element of the children of God, "Every one that loveth is born of God." But Saul had conceived such an intense disgust against the followers of the Crucified, that he hauled them to prison and voted for their death.

Brothers, we have no right to persecute any man for his religion or his irreligion, whether he be Catholic, Jew, Turk, or Infidel, we must do nothing wrong towards him, nor rob him of any of his rights, however erroneous his views may be. We are bound to be just and right towards all men as men, whatever their religions convictions, or irreligious notions.

Injustice is no friend to truth. We must not fight God's battles with the weapons of ill-will. For us to hate those who are in error, and talk of them with contempt or wish them ill, or do them wrong, is not according to the Spirit of Christ. You cannot cast out Satan by Satan, nor correct error by violence, nor overcome hate by hate.

The conquering weapon of the Christian is love, and if Paul had sought to overthrow what he thought to be an error by love, although he had been mistaken, he would not have been so guilty. Whoever they might be, whether righteous or wicked, men or women, he would compel them to blaspheme the name of Jesus, whom he judged to be an impostor. He seeks to domineer over their consciences, and to oppress them for their belief—how, then, can God hear his prayer?

If you have the spirit of hate in you, it nullifies your devotions, and makes your prayer to be no prayer. In love lies the essence of prayer, and prayer ought to be the flower and crown of love. If I go through the world hating my fellow men because they differ from me, and determining to force my own doctrines upon others with an iron hand, I cannot lift that hand in prayer. A malicious heart pollutes the sacrifice which it offers. When I come before God in prayer, I may be offending Him when I dream that I am pleasing Him.

Friend, if you are living an ungodly life, I do not care how regularly you bend your knee in seeming devotion, there is nothing in it. If you are not living as a Christian should do, your prayers prove nothing, your matins and your vespers, your family prayers and your prayer meetings are the mimicry of prayer, and nothing more.

You may have been baptized, and you may have frequented the communion, but it is all mockery, the caricature of godliness, and nothing more, unless you strive after holiness, and labor to conform your life to the will of God. God will hear *us* when we hear *Him*. He will do our will when we do His will, but persistence in known sin, and especially indulgence in enmity and hatred, are so destructive to prayer, that till we are free from them we do not pray.

Be at peace with all men, or talk not of prayer. Lay aside all opposition to the Gospel of the Lord Jesus or you can no more pray than a fiend of the pit.

Yet again, Saul with all his prayers had never truly prayed, because *humility* was absent from his devotions. What a test this is! Saul had gone about the world feeling that he was a righteous man. Did he not wear texts of Scripture between his eyes? What a pious man he was! Had he not broad borders to his garments—borders of blue? What a saint he was! Did he not fast thrice in the week, and pay tithes of mint and anise and cumin? There was not a better man in all the dominions of Caesar than this Saul in his own judgment.

When he prayed, there was a high flavor of self-righteousness in his religious exercises, and this made them disgusting to the Most High. The Lord delights in humble and contrite spirits, but the proud He knows afar off. There was no confession of sin, no crying for mercy through a propitiation. His prayer was the expression of thankfulness that Saul of Tarsus was a Hebrew of the Hebrews, as touching the law blameless. In the courts above, where outward appearances are nothing, and God looks at the heart, his pious harangues were not reckoned to be prayers at all.

If you feel quite content with your own prayers, permit me to suggest that you do not pray, for few who pray aright are ever content with their own petitions. Those who dream themselves to belong to the Good-enough family will find themselves bad enough, and the Too-goods will find themselves shut out of heaven.

If you have a righteousness made out of your prayers, throw it to the dogs. Self-righteousness is a leaven which the Lord commands us to put away, for He abhors it, and considers that it pollutes His Passover. If you pray as a deserving person, pleading your own good deeds, there is such a lie at the bottom of your prayers that you have not prayed at all.

I say again this makes terrible work of a great many persons who have been brought up in outward religion. Dear friend, be not vexed or angry if this should seem to come home to you. If before your eyes the whole heap upon your threshing floor should be blown away like chaff, thank God that it has been blown away so soon, while there is time to gather the true wheat.

It is better for you to make the sad discovery now than to make it when you come to die, or to wake up in another world where there will be no hope of rectifying the error. Do let this thought come to every professor of religion this morning, that you may have been a praying man or woman for years, you may have come like Saul of Tarsus to the fullness of your age, and have abounded in the appearance of devotion, and yet you may have to pray to God for the first time.

II. This brings me to my second reflection, and that is, IT IS IMPLIED IN THE TEXT THAT IT WAS A REMARKABLE THING FOR SUCH A PERSON NOW TO PRAY.

It is put with an *ecce*, a mark of admiration, "Behold, he prayeth!" It is a very difficult thing, a very marvelous thing, for a man to truly pray who has been all his lifetime praying in a false way. It is a miracle of grace to bring a proud Pharisee to plead for mercy like a penitent publican. It is not half so wonderful that an irreligious man should begin to pray as that a vainglorious professor should begin to pray.

The most remarkable conversion that could take place here today would not be that of Elymas the sorcerer, but of Saul the Pharisee. The most remarkable conversion in the apostolic age was that of a man who from his youth up had been plunged in self-righteousness, and in the self-content which comes of attention to ritual, and ceremony, and the form of godliness. "Behold *he* prayeth."

It is hard for him to pray, because he is a person who has been a formalist for a long time, is so rooted in the *habit* of formal devotion, and so contented with it, that it is extremely difficult to bring him to attend to spiritual things. The letter kills in more senses than one, and the man so killed has no life for the things of the spirit.

If he goes up to his chamber at the hour of prayer, he runs along the old trams without the least feeling and heart. He repeats the words, but he might as well be reading an unknown language. The tendency is to say the same thing over and over again till the lips move mechanically, and the soul is in a deep slumber. The Bible is read, but the mind is dozing. The sermon is heard, but the heart is wandering. Where is the good of this?

Yet how hard it is to get men out of it! It is easier to attend a thousand masses, or to go to church every day in the week, than to offer one true prayer. It is very difficult for you who are rich in nominal devotion to enter the kingdom of heaven. It is hard to get the robe of Christ's righteousness upon that man's back who believes that his own coat is as good as it needs to be—he has worn his own rags so long that they cling to him.

He is too proud to beg, for he has so long lived like a gentleman on his own income. He has been so long rich and increased in goods, and in need of nothing, and he has grown so used to his way of external and superficial religion, that you cannot get him, without a miracle of grace, to seek after that which is deep and true.

Again, *self-righteousness* is a very great hindrance to coming to Christ in prayer. In Christ's day, the publicans and harlots entered the kingdom before the Pharisees, who were self-righteous. It is a great thing to conquer sinful self, but it is a greater thing to overcome righteous self. The man who is downright bad and feels it, asks for mercy. But these people are bad at heart, and do *not* feel it, therefore they will not seek the Lord.

They think that they have done everything they ought to have done. Wrapping themselves about in their shoddy righteousness, they imagine themselves to be quite fit to enter into the royal feast without putting on the wedding garment of the king's providing. It costs a self-righteous man a great effort to stoop to prayer.

If he did but know that his righteousness is only a part of his filthiness, he would change his note. The Scripture says, "All our righteousnesses are as filthy rags." When we see them to be such, we are glad to be rid of them, for they are loathsome in themselves, and the foul disease of pride poisons every thread.

The man that has been accustomed to pray without his heart, and to be pious without being converted, is very hard to be made to pray, because he is *prejudiced* against the way of grace. He has made up his mind that he will not see the light of God, because he believes in his own light. You talk to him about salvation by grace, redemption by the precious blood, and justification by faith alone, but he cannot endure such themes—they may suit the wicked, but he is of another breed.

He is overshadowed with the glory of his own self, and therefore he cannot see the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. The habit of superficial external religion once formed is as hard to break as for the Ethiopian to change his skin. A man hugs his self-righteousness as he hugs his life. Skin for skin, yea, all that a man has, will he give for his legal life, the life of self.

Besides, a self-righteous man knows that everybody thinks him to be right, and therefore he cannot demean himself by such prayers and confessions as might suit a common sinner. If you talk to him about being converted, why, dear sir, he needs no conversion. He was born good. He has always been a Christian, he needs no change, you don't know what a fine gentleman he is!

He never cries in the bitterness of his soul, "God be merciful to me a sinner." Why should he? His mother and father were extremely good people, and he was born again at the font, and has since been confirmed. What do you want more? Washed in the blood of Jesus! Well, perhaps he needs this as others do, but there is no special sin in him, nothing certainly for which he could be condemned.

Persons who are of this order are seldom brought to pray. They may be called reprobate silver, for the Lord has rejected them. If ever such as these are saved, it will astonish men and angels, and the Lord Himself will cry, "Behold, he prayeth."

Even religious intensity and fervor may become a hindrance to a man's conversion when that ardor is for a false faith. The earnest formalist is encased in steel, and the arrows of the Gospel glance from him. Some worship every nail of the church door, and every tile of the chancel—if such a thing as a priest should cross the road, they are ready to kiss the ground he treads upon. How can these be brought to the simplicity of the faith?

Among Dissenters are there not persons who are obstinate for trifles, conservative for old methods, hide-bound with habit, ferocious for externals, and yet devoid of spiritual life? Those who have none of the inward and spiritual grace are often the more fierce for the outward and visible sign. The man who has no money is a great stickler for a respectable appearance, the fact being that if he does not keep that up, he will soon be in the *Gazette*.

A sincerely gracious Christian is tempted rather to think too little of externals than too much of them. He sets the highest value upon the inner life, and faith in the Lord Jesus. I say again, brethren, it is such a wonderful thing that the externally-religious man ever should begin to pray in earnest that it is recorded as a wonder. "Behold, he prayeth."

See what was needed in Saul's case to make him pray—the Lord Jesus must Himself appear and bring him to his knees. Nothing less than a light shining from heaven could show him his vileness. Oh that such a light would break upon all self-righteous souls! The proud man must fall to the earth, cast down from his high places. Until he lies low he will still glory in his flesh.

He must be struck with blindness, that he may be ready to accept the sight of faith. Three days he must neither eat nor drink, to wean him from earth, and make him feed on the bread of heaven. Great must be the agony of his spirit, for he that has been so intensely self-righteous cannot be brought to Christ without a wrench. He that has rested in himself so completely and so long needs to be torn up by the roots ere he will quit his carnal confidences. It takes, as it were, a special interposition of grace to bring a religious professor to pray in spirit and in truth.

III. And now I want you to notice, in the third place, that albeit it was a great wonder that Saul prayed, yet IT IS DIVINELY DECLARED IN THE TEXT THAT HE DID PRAY.

One would have liked to have heard Saul of Tarsus pray. See him now! This fine, good man! How humble, how lowly he is! His prayer began with a full and grievous confession of sin. He offered neither excuse nor extenuation. He looked to Him whom he had pierced, and mourned for Him. He owned that he was the chief of sinners—"Because I persecuted the church of God." The only thing he could say by way of apology was, "I did it ignorantly, in unbelief."

See there, alone in his chamber, with his eyes opened and yet blinded, He weeps, and cries, and groans, and humbles himself before the Lord. Indeed he prays. The other day as he rode along to Damascus everybody looked upon him as a saint, but now by his own confession he is a sinner of the blackest sort.

Hear how he defames himself. He repents in dust and ashes. He prays for mercy, he begs to be forgiven his scarlet sins. He owns that if he were sent to hell it would be no more than just, but he begs

that for the Savior's sake he may be spared and permitted to see the light of God's countenance. I think I hear him making this sad confession. Behold, he prayeth now!

Now you will find him acknowledging his great need. Why, he says, "Lord, I need everything. It is not one thing that I am devoid of, but everything is gone that is worth having. I need a new heart and a right spirit. I need truth in the hidden parts, and that in the inward parts I may be made to know wisdom."

He had nothing to boast of—he had turned from a boastful millionaire into a beggar. He would cry, "Lord, give me my sight again, but specially grant me my spiritual sight. Take away the scales from my heart as well as from my eyes. Help me to see Jesus as my Savior! Help me to live to His glory, as before I have lived to persecute Him." He prayed this time, and none could doubt it.

I think I can see mingled with that prayer the lowliest adoration. How he would worship Jesus of Nazareth as his God now that he was conquered by Him! How he would cry, "My Lord, my Lord, have I been persecuting You? Are You the Messiah whom all the twelve tribes expected, and have I rejected You? Did I sit to see Your servant Stephen stoned, and keep the garments of those that stoned him, and I have been breathing out threatenings against You, my Lord?"

Surely the deep homage of his chastened spirit must have come up sweetly before the exalted Lord as Saul bowed himself in the dust before Him, and said again and again, "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ." "Behold, he prayeth!"

Consider what pleas he had. Did it ever strike you how Saul must have pleaded? Pleading is the truest and strongest part of prayer. Now, how did Saul of Tarsus plead? Assuredly he urged the promise, "Let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon."

He knew the Old Testament Scriptures better than we do, and he would be sure to use them in his prayer. I hear him crying, "O Lord, You have said, 'Come, now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord; though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.'"

Surely, he also went over that fifty-first Psalm, every bit of it—it suited him exactly. "Deliver me from blood-guiltiness, O God, thou God of my salvation: and my tongue shall sing aloud of thy righteousness."

Do you not think that when he had gone over those promises he would then plead the types of the ceremonial law concerning Christ? How the fifty-third of Isaiah must have flashed in on his mind! He was blinded, but what a light must have flamed up in his spirit as he saw the Man of sorrows, the acquaintance of grief, and heard the prophet say, "Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows….The chastisement of our peace was upon him."

How Saul would begin to cry to Jesus, "Oh, Son of God, be my scapegoat, be my sin offering, be my morning and evening sacrifice! Be to me the blood of sprinkling, and the Paschal Lamb!" Knowing, as he did, all the types of the Jewish law, he must have found them rich in comfort now that, in beholding Jesus, he had found the key of them all.

And beloved, all this must have been steeped in a wonderful fervor. If we could have stood outside the door and listened, we should have understood why the Lord said, "Behold, he prayeth." Before, you might have heard him repeating words, but now he uttered groans, and cries, and sobs, and tears. Before, you might have said to yourself, "He is saying his prayers."

But this time it was as when a man wrestles for his life, and is in bitterness for his only son. All previous prayer was sham, but this was real. All the rest was but a performance, but now he did real business with the Most High. "Behold, he prayeth." Now he is a real Israel, and lo, he comes off more than conqueror through Him that has taught him to pray.

IV. Lastly, we see that as soon as he did pray, IT WAS EVIDENT THAT THE LORD ACCEPTED HIS PRAYER.

How do I know this from the text, "Behold, he prayeth"? Well, I know it from the text first, because here is God *bearing witness* that he did pray. Might not the Lord stand in a prayer meeting, and hear a dozen of us talk our piece, and never say, "Behold, he prayeth"? But if a voice from heaven were to say concerning someone, "Behold, he prayeth," we should know that the man was accepted of the Lord.

So was it with Saul. The first time he prayed, God heard him. Try it, my friend, try it. If this is your first prayer this morning, breathe it to God with humble faith and He will hear you.

We know that God had accepted this first prayer, for He was *about to answer it*. He had Ananias in readiness to go and comfort the poor blinded penitent. God is about to answer your prayer, my dear brother, this morning if you have cried to Him. Perhaps the man is present in the Tabernacle who will speak to you before you leave these walls, or somebody will soon call to tell you the way of peace more perfectly. If now you quit the way of self-righteousness and formal devotion, and begin to cry out for the living God, that God will meet you.

Moreover, we are sure that God accepted this first prayer because He *called attention to it* by a "Behold." It is as if God said to angels, to men, to everybody, "Behold, he prayeth." We have heard of the seven wonders of the world, and of other marvels concerning which men cry, "Behold." But that which strikes God most is a praying man, a sinner praying. God does not say, "Behold Herod on his throne," or "Behold Caesar in his palace." But He does say, "Behold, he prayeth," as if He would make the praying man the center of observation, the focus of regard. "Behold, he prayeth,"

The heart of God is delighted with true prayer. The arch-enemy notices true prayer, and trembles when a man falls on his knees. And God would have all His saints on earth, and His saints in heaven, look down upon a man in prayer. To the great Father's heart, it is a prodigal returning. He cries, "Behold, he prayeth," but He means, "Behold, he is coming home! Behold, he seeks his Father's face! Behold, I have found my son which I had lost!" Prayer is God's delight, God's admiration.

Beloved, has this ever been the case with you, that you could draw the attention of the great God to yourself? I am afraid there are many of whom it would have to be said, "Behold, he never prays!" What a sight upon earth!—a man created by his Maker who never worships his Creator, a man who is daily fed by God's bounty, and never worships Him!

Sir, you are a monster, you are a creature among men most loathsome. A man that lives without prayer ought not to live. It is a wonder that the earth does not open her mouth and swallow up such a wretch. And yet when he does pray, God makes a wonder of it.

It is his first prayer this morning. I see him, the sermon is over, and he has reached home. He has gone up to his room—he is afraid somebody will come in and disturb him—he is turning the key. He is kneeling by the side of that bed on which he has slept so often without prayer, and he cries, "O God, I do not know what to say, but be merciful to me a sinner, and forgive my sins."

I hear the rustling wings of angels as they gather around the sacred spot. Soon they fly upward crying, "Behold, he prayeth." Years shall pass on with you, young man, and you shall come to middle life, and be exposed to sharp temptation, what will you do then? Good spirits watch you, fearing lest you should go astray, and devils watch for your halting.

You will then remember that day in the middle of September when you first prayed, and you will say to yourself, "I will again cry unto God, as I have often done." You go upstairs and say, "Lord, many days have passed since first I cried to You, and I have not ceased to cry, but now I am in special trouble. I beseech You, deliver me!" God will help you. The great wheel of providence will revolve for you. Meanwhile, both angels and devils have spied you out—the angels sing and the devils mutter, "Behold, he prayeth."

A few years have passed, the young man has grown old, and the time is come that he must die. He has gone up to the same room for the last time, and there are those about him who weep and watch. Mark the sweet serenity of the departing soul! He is looking into eternity without fear. He knows whom he has believed, and he is ready to depart. What is he doing in his expiring moments? "Behold, he prayeth." Prayer, which has long been his vital breath and native air, is now—

"His watchword at the gates of death;
He enters heaven with prayer."

Demons that gather about our last hour shall flee away as bats fly out of a cavern scared by a torch. They shall flee when they hear the voice, "Behold, he prayeth." The shining ones shall gladly meet the soul that is on Jordan's bank when they hear the voice, "Behold, he prayeth." They shall meet the praying spirit on the hither side of the river, and shall smile while the prayer of earth melts into the praise of heaven. Soon shall we be forever with the Lord.

God grant it may be so, for His name's sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—
LUKE 18:1-14 AND ACTS 9:1-22

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—138, 977, 981

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.