

PRAYER—THE FORERUNNER OF MERCY

NO. 138

A SERMON
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“Thus says the Lord God: I will yet for this be inquired of by the house of Israel to do it for them; I will increase them with men like a flock.”
Ezekiel 36:37.

IN reading the chapter we have seen the great and exceedingly precious promises which God had made to the favored nation of Israel. God in this verse declares that though the promise was made and though He would fulfill it, yet He would not fulfill it until His people asked Him to do so. He would give them a spirit of prayer by which they would cry earnestly for the blessing and then, when they have cried aloud unto the living God, He would be pleased to answer them from heaven, His dwelling place. The word used here to express the idea of prayer is a suggestive one. “I will yet for this be *inquired of* by the house of Israel.” Prayer, then, is an inquiry! No man can pray aright unless he views prayer in that light. First, I inquire what the promise is. I turn to my Bible and I seek to find the promise whereby the thing which I desire to seek is certified to me as being a thing which God is willing to give. Having inquired so far as that, I take that promise and on my bended knees I inquire of God whether He will fulfill His own promise. I take to Him His own word of covenant and I say to Him, “O Lord, will You not fulfill it and will You not fulfill it now?” And so there again prayer is *inquiry*. After prayer I look for the answer, I expect to be heard and if I am not answered I pray again and my repeated prayers are but fresh inquiries. I expect the blessing to arrive. I go and inquire whether there are any tidings of its coming. I ask and thus I say, “Will You answer me, O Lord? Will You keep Your promise? Or will You shut up Your ears because I misunderstand my own needs and mistake Your promise?” Brothers and sisters, we must use inquiry in prayer and regard prayer as being, first, *an inquiry for the promise*, and then, on the strength of that promise, *an inquiry for the fulfillment*. We expect something to come as a present from a friend—we first have the note, whereby we are informed it is upon the road. We inquire as to what the present is by the reading of the note and then, if it arrives not, we call at the accustomed place where the parcel ought to have been left and we ask or inquire for such-and-such a thing. We have inquired about the promise and then we go and inquire, again, until we get an answer that the promised gift has arrived and is ours. And so it is with prayer. We get the promise by inquiry and we get the fulfillment of it by again inquiring at God’s hands!

Now, this morning I shall try, as God shall help me, first to speak of prayer as *the prelude of blessing*. Next, I shall try to show why prayer is thus constituted by God *the forerunner of His mercies*. And then, I shall close by an *exhortation*, as earnest as I can make it, exhorting you to pray, if you would obtain blessings.

I. Prayer is the FORERUNNER OF MERCIES. Many despise prayer—they despise it because they do not understand it. He who knows how to use that sacred art of prayer will obtain so much thereby that *from its very profitableness* he will be led to speak of it with the highest reverence.

Prayer, we assert, is the prelude of all mercies. We bid you turn back to sacred history and you will find that never did a great mercy come to this world unheralded by prayer. The promise comes alone, with no preventing merit to precede it, but the blessing promised always follows its herald, prayer. You shall note that all the wonders that God did in the old times were first of all sought at His hands by the earnest prayers of His believing people. The other Sabbath [Sermon #136, Vol. 3—ISRAEL IN EGYPT] we beheld Pharaoh cast into the depths of the Red Sea, and all his hosts, “still as a stone,” in the depths of the waters. Was there a prayer that preceded that magnificent overthrow of the Lord’s enemies? Turn to the book of Exodus and you will read, “The children of Israel sighed by reason of the bondage and they

cried and their cry came up unto God by reason of the bondage.” And mark you—just before the sea parted and made a highway for the Lord’s people through its bosom—Moses had prayed unto the Lord and cried earnestly unto Him, so that Jehovah said, “Why do you cry unto Me?” A few Sabbaths ago, when we preached on the subject of the rain which came down from heaven in the days of Elijah, [Sermon #134, Vol. 3—ELIJAH’S APPEAL TO THE UNDECIDED] you will remember how we pictured the land of Judea as an arid wilderness, a mass of dust, destitute of all vegetation. Rain had not fallen for three years! The pastures were dried up. The brooks had ceased to flow. Poverty and distress stared the nation in the face. At an appointed season a sound was heard of abundance of rain and the torrents poured from the skies until the earth was deluged with the happy floods. Do you ask me whether prayer was the prelude to that? I point you to the top of Carmel. Behold a man kneeling before his God, crying, “O my God! Send the rain.” Lo, the majesty of his faith! He sends his servant, Gehazi, to look seven times for the clouds because he believes that they will come in answer to his prayer. And mark the fact—the torrents of rain were the offspring of Elijah’s faith and prayer. Wherever in Holy Writ you shall find the blessing, you shall find the prayer that went before it!

Our Lord Jesus Christ was the greatest blessing that men ever had. He was God’s best benefit to a sorrowing world. And did prayer precede Christ’s advent? Was there any prayer which went before the coming of the Lord, when He appeared in the Temple? Oh yes, the prayers of saints for many ages had followed each other. Abraham saw His day and when he died, Isaac took up the note and when Isaac slept with his fathers, Jacob and the patriarchs still continued to pray. Yes, and in the very days of Christ, prayer was still made for Him continually—Anna the prophetess and the venerable Simeon still looked for the coming of Christ. And day by day they prayed and interceded with God that He would suddenly come to His Temple.

Yes, and mark—as it has been in Sacred Writ, so it shall be with regard to greater things that are yet to happen in the fulfillment of promises. I believe that the Lord Jesus Christ will one day come in the clouds of heaven. It is my firm belief in common with all who read the Sacred Scriptures aright that the day is approaching when the Lord Jesus shall stand a second time upon the earth—when He shall reign with illimitable sway over all the habitable parts of the globe—when kings shall bow before Him and queens shall be nursing mothers of His Church. But when shall that time come? We shall know its coming by its prelude when prayer shall become more loud and strong, when supplication shall become more universal and more incessant than even as when the tree puts forth her first green leaves. We expect that the spring approaches—even so when prayer shall become more hearty and earnest—we may open our eyes for the day of our redemption draws near! Great prayer is the preface of great mercy and in proportion to our prayer is the blessing that we may expect!

It has been so *in the history of the modern Church*. Whenever she has been awakened to pray, it is then that God has awakened to her help. Jerusalem, when you have shaken yourself from the dust, your Lord has taken His sword from the scabbard. When you have suffered your hands to hang down and your knees to become feeble, He has left you to become scattered by your enemies. You have become barren and your children have been cut off, but when you have learned to cry—when you have begun to pray—God has restored unto you the joy of His salvation and He has gladdened your heart and multiplied your children. The history of the Church up to this age has been a series of waves, a succession of ebbs and flows. A strong wave of religious prosperity has washed over the sands of sin. Again it has receded and immorality has reigned. You shall read in English history—it has been the same. Did the righteous prosper in the days of Edward VI? They shall again be tormented under a Bloody Mary! Did Puritanism become omnipotent over the land, did the glorious Cromwell reign and did the saints triumph? Charles the Second’s debaucheries and wickedness became the black receding wave. Again, Whitefield and Wesley poured throughout the nation a mighty wave of religion, which like a torrent drove everything before it. Again it receded and there came the days of Payne and of men full of infidelity and wickedness. Again there came a strong impulse and again God glorified Himself. And up to this date, again, there has been a decline. Religion, though more fashionable than it once was, has lost much of its vitality and power. Much of the zeal and earnestness of the ancient preachers has departed and the wave has receded again. But, blessed be God, flood tide has again set in—once more God has awakened

His Church! We have seen in these days what our fathers never hoped to see—we have seen the great men of a Church, not too noted for its activity, at last coming forth—and God is with them in their coming forth! They have come forth to preach unto the people the unsearchable riches of God! I hope we may have another great wave of religion rolling in upon us. Shall I tell you what I conceive to be the moon that influences these waves? My brothers and sisters, even as the moon influences the tides of the sea, even so does *prayer*, (which is the reflection of the sunlight of heaven and is God's moon in the sky), influence the tides of godliness! When our prayers become like the crescent moon and when we stand not in conjunction with the sun, then there is but a shallow tide of godliness. But when the full orb shines upon the earth and when God Almighty makes the prayers of His people full of joy and gladness, it is then that the sea of Grace returns to its strength! In proportion to the prayerfulness of the Church shall be its present success, though its ultimate success is beyond the reach of hazard.

And now, again, to come nearer home—this truth of God is true of each of you, my dearly beloved in the Lord, *in your own personal experience*. God has given you many an unsolicited favor but still, great prayer has always been the great prelude of great mercy with you. When you first found peace through the blood of the cross, you had been praying much beforehand and earnestly interceding with God that He would remove your doubts and deliver you from your distresses. Your assurance was the result of prayer! And when at any time you have had high and rapturous joys, you have been obliged to look upon them as answers to your prayers. When you have had great deliverances out of sore troubles and mighty helps in great dangers, you have been able to say, “I cried unto the Lord and He heard me and delivered me out of all my fears.” Prayer, we say, in your case, as well as in the case of the Church at large, is always the preface to blessing!

And now, some will say to me, “In what way do you regard prayer, then, as affecting the blessing? God, the Holy Spirit vouchsafes prayer before the blessing. But in what way is prayer connected with the blessing?” I reply, prayer goes before the blessing in several senses.

It goes before the blessing, *as the blessing's shadow*. When the sunlight of God's mercy rises upon our necessities, it casts the shadow of prayer far down upon the plain, or, to use another illustration, when God piles up a hill of mercies, He, Himself, shines behind them and He casts on our spirits the shadow of prayer, so that we may rest certain. If we are in prayer, our prayers are the shadows of mercy. Prayer is the rustling of the wings of the angels that are on their way bringing us the gifts of heaven. Have you heard prayer in your heart? You shall see the angel in your house! When the chariots that bring us blessings rumble, their wheels sound with prayer. We hear the prayer in our own spirits and that prayer becomes the token of the coming blessings! Even as the cloud foreshadows rain, so prayer foreshadows the blessing. Even as the green blade is the beginning of the harvest, so is prayer the prophecy of the blessing that is about to come!

Again—prayer goes before mercy, *as the representative of it*. Oftentimes the king, in his progress through his realms, sends one before him who blows a trumpet. And when the people see him, they know that the king comes because the trumpeter is there. But, perhaps, there is before him a more important personage, who says, “I am sent before the king to prepare for his reception and I am this day to receive anything that you have to send the king, for I am his representative.” So prayer is the representative of the blessing before the blessing comes. The prayer comes and when I see the prayer, I say, “Prayer, you are the vice regent of the blessing. If the blessing is the king, you are the regent. I know and look upon you as being the representative of the blessing I am about to receive.”

But I also think that sometimes and generally, prayer goes before the blessing *even as the cause goes before the effect*. Some people say when they get anything that they get it because they prayed for it. But if they are people who are not spiritually-minded and who have no faith, let them know that whatever they may get, it is not in answer to prayer—for we know that God hears not sinners and the “sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord.” “Well,” says one, “I asked God for such-and-such a thing the other day. I know I am no Christian but I got it. Don't you consider that I had it through my prayers?” No, sir, no more than I believe the reasoning of the old man who affirmed that the Goodwin Sands had been caused by the building of Tenterden Steeple! The sands had not been there, before, and the sea did not come up till it was built and, therefore, he said, the steeple must have caused the flood! Now, your

prayers have no more connection with your blessing than the sea with the steeple. But in the Christian's case it is far different! Oftentimes the blessing is actually brought down from heaven by the prayer. An objector may reply, "I believe that prayer may have much influence on yourself, sir, but I do not believe that it has any effect on the Divine Being." Well, sir, I shall not try to convince you because it is as useless for me to try to convince you of that, unless you believe the testimonies I bring, as it would be to convince you of any historical fact by simply reasoning about it. I could bring out of this congregation not one, nor twenty, but many hundreds who are rational, intelligent persons and who would, each of them, most positively declare that some hundreds of times in their lives they have been led to seek most earnestly, deliverance out of trouble, or help in adversity—and they have received the answers to their prayers in so marvelous a manner that they, themselves, did no more doubt their being answers to their cries than they could doubt the existence of a God! They felt sure that He heard them. They were certain of it. Oh, the testimonies to the power of prayer are so numerous that the man who rejects them flies in the face of good testimonies! We are not all enthusiasts. Some of us are cool-blooded enough—we are not all fanatics. We are not all quite wild in our piety. Some of us in other things, we reckon, act in a tolerably common-sense way. But yet we all agree in this—that our prayers have been heard—and we could tell many stories of our prayers, still fresh upon our memories, where we have cried unto God and He has heard us! But the man who says he does not believe God hears prayer, knows He does. I have no respect for his skepticism, any more than I have any respect for a man's doubt about the existence of a God. The man does not doubt it! He has to choke his own conscience before he dares to say he does. It is complimenting him too much to argue with him. Will you argue with a liar? He affirms a lie and knows it is so. Will you condescend to argue with him to prove that he is a liar? The man is incapable of reasoning! He is beyond the pale of those who ought to be treated as respectable persons. If a man rejects the existence of God, he does it desperately against his own conscience and if he is bad enough to stifle his own conscience so much as to believe that, or pretend that he believes it, we think we shall demean ourselves if we argue with so loose a character! He must be solemnly warned, for reason is thrown away upon deliberate liars. But you know, sir, God hears prayer—because if you do not, either way you must be a fool! You are a fool for not believing so and a worse fool for praying, yourself, when you do not believe He hears you. "But I do not pray, sir." Do not pray? Did I not hear a whisper from your nurse when you were sick? She said you were a wonderful saint when you had the fever. You do not pray? No, but when things do not go quite well in business, you would to God that they would go better and you do, sometimes, cry out to Him a kind of prayer which He cannot accept but which is still enough to show that there is an instinct in man that teaches him to pray!

I believe that even as birds build their nests without any teaching, so men use prayer in the form of it (I do not mean *spiritual* prayer)—I say, men use prayer from the very instinct of nature! There is something in man which makes him a praying animal. He cannot help it. He is obliged to do it. He laughs at himself when he is on the dry land. But he prays when he is on the sea and in a storm! He may not pray when he is well, but when he is sick, he prays as fast as anybody. He would not pray when he is rich, but when he is poor, he then prays strongly enough! He knows God hears prayer and he knows that men should pray—but there is no disputing with him—if he dares to deny his own conscience, he is incapable of reasoning—he is beyond the pale of morality and, therefore, we dare not try to influence him by reasoning. We may and hope we can use other means with him, but not that which compliments him by allowing him to answer! O saints of God, whatever you can give up, you can never give up this truth of God—that He hears prayer! If you did disbelieve it today, you would have to believe it again tomorrow, for you would have such another proof of it through some other trouble that would roll over your head that you would be obliged to feel, if you were not obliged to say, "Verily, God hears and answers prayer."

Prayer, then, is the prelude of mercy, for very often it is the cause of the blessing. That is to say, it is a part cause. The mercy of God being the great first cause, prayer is often the secondary agency whereby the blessing is brought down.

II. And now I am going to try to show you, in the second place, WHY IT IS THAT GOD IS PLEASED TO MAKE PRAYER THE TRUMPETER OF MERCY, OR THE FORERUNNER OF IT.

1. I think it is, in the first place, *because God loves that man should have some reason for having a connection with Him.* Says God, “My creatures will shun Me; even My own people will too little seek Me—they will flee from Me instead of coming to Me. What shall I do? I intend to bless them—shall I lay the blessings at their doors so that when they open them in the morning they may find them there, unasked and unsought? Yes,” says God, “many mercies I will do so with. I will give them much that they need without their seeking for it. But in order that they may not wholly forget Me, there are some mercies that I will not put at their doors. I will make them come to My house after them. I love My children to visit Me,” says the heavenly Father, “I love to see them in My courts, I delight to hear their voices and to see their faces. They will not come to see Me if I give them all they need. I will keep them sometimes, without, and then they will come to Me and ask—and I shall have the pleasure of seeing them and they will have the profit of entering into fellowship with Me.” It is as if some father should say to his son who is entirely dependent upon him, “I might give you a fortune at once, so that you might never have to come to me again. But, my son, it delights me, it affords me pleasure to supply your needs. I like to know what it is you require so that I may oftentimes have to give you and so may frequently see your face. Now I shall give you only enough to serve you for such a time, and if you need anything, you must come to my house for it. O, my son, I do this because I desire to see you often! I desire to have many opportunities of showing how much I love you.” So does God say to His children, “I do not give you all at once; I give all to you in the promise, but if you want to have it in the detail, you must come to Me to ask Me for it—so shall you see My face and so shall you have a reason for often coming to My feet.”

2. But there is another reason. God would make prayer the preface to mercy *because often prayer itself gives the mercy.* You are full of fear and sorrow—you need comfort. God says, pray and you shall get it. And the reason is because prayer is of itself a comforting exercise. We are all aware that when we have any heavy news upon our minds, it often relieves us if we can tell a friend about it. Now there are some troubles we would not tell to others, for perhaps many minds could not sympathize with us—God has therefore provided *prayer* as a channel for the flow of grief! “Come,” He says, “your troubles may find vent here. Come, put them into My ear—pour out your heart before Me and so will you prevent its bursting. If you must weep, come and weep at My mercy seat. If you must cry, come and cry in the closet, and I will hear you.” And how often have you and I tried that? We have been on our knees, overwhelmed with sorrow, and we have risen up and said, “Ah, I can meet it all now!”—

*“Now I can say my God is mine—
Now I can all my joys resign,
Can tread the world beneath my feet,
And all that earth calls good or great.”*

Prayer itself sometimes gives the mercy.

Take another case. You are in difficulty; you don’t know which way to go, nor how to act. God has said that He will *direct* His people. You go forth in prayer and pray to God to direct you. Are you aware that your very prayer will frequently, of itself, furnish you with the answer? While the mind is absorbed in thinking over the matter and in praying concerning the matter, it is just in the likeliest state to suggest to itself the course which is proper. For while, in prayer, I am spreading all the circumstances before God, I am like a warrior surveying the battlefield—and when I rise, I know the state of affairs and know how to act. Often, thus, you see, prayer gives the very thing we ask for in itself! Often when I have had a passage of Scripture that I cannot understand, I am in the habit of spreading the Bible before me. And if I have looked at all the commentators and they do not seem to agree, I have spread the Bible on my chair, kneeled down, put my finger upon the passage and sought God’s instruction. I have thought that when I have risen from my knees, I understood it far better than before. I believe that the very exercise of prayer did, of itself, bring the answer, to a great degree, for the mind being occupied upon it and the heart being exercised with it, the whole man was in the most excellent position for truly understanding it! John Bunyan said, “The truths of God that I know best, I have learned on my knees.” And he said again, “I never know a thing well till it is burned into my heart by prayer.” Now that is, in a great measure, through the agency of God’s Holy Spirit, but I think that it may also, in some measure, be accounted for by the fact that prayer exercises the mind upon the thing and then the mind is led by an insensible

process to lay hold upon the right result! Prayer, then, is a suitable prelude to the blessing, because it often carries the blessing in itself.

3. But again, it seems but right and just and appropriate that prayer should go before the *blessing*, because in prayer there is a sense of need. I cannot distribute assistance to those who do not represent their case to me as being destitute and sick. I cannot suppose that the physician will trouble himself to leave his own house to go into the house of one that is ill unless the need has been specified to him and unless he has been informed that the case requires his assistance. Nor can we expect of God that He will wait upon His own people unless His own people should first state their need to Him—shall feel their need and come before Him crying for a blessing! A sense of need is a divine gift—prayer fosters it and is, therefore, highly beneficial.

4. And yet again, prayer before the blessing serves to show us the value of it. If we had the blessings without asking for them, we would think them common things. But prayer makes the common pebbles of God's temporal bounties more precious than diamonds! And in *spiritual* prayer, the cut diamond glitters more. The thing was precious, but I did not know its preciousness till I had sought for it and sought it long. After a long chase, the hunter prizes the animal because he has set his heart upon it and is determined to have it. And yet more truly, after a long hunger, he that eats finds more relish in his food. So prayer does sweeten the mercy. Prayer teaches us its preciousness. It is the reading over of the will, the schedule, and the account—before the estate and the properties are themselves transferred. We know the value of the purchase by reading over the will of it in prayer and when we have groaned out our own expression of its peerless price, and then it is that God bestows the benediction upon us! Prayer, therefore, goes before the blessing, because it shows us the value of it.

But doubtless even reason itself suggests that it is but natural that God, the All-Good, should give His favors to those who ask. It seems but right that He should expect of us that we should first ask at His hands and then He will bestow. It is goodness great enough that His hand is ready to open—surely it is but little that He should say to His people, “For this thing will I be inquired of by the house of Israel to do it for them.”

III. Let me close BY STIRRING YOU UP TO USE THE HOLY ART OF PRAYER AS A MEANS OF OBTAINING THE BLESSING. Do you demand of me, “and for what shall we pray?” The answer is upon my tongue. Pray for *yourselves*, pray for your families, pray for the *Churches*, pray for *the one great kingdom of our Lord on earth*.

Pray for *yourselves*. Surely you will never lack some subject for intercession! So broad are your needs, so deep are your necessities that until you are in heaven you will always find room for prayer! Do you need nothing? Then I fear you do not know yourself. Have you no mercy to ask of God? Then I fear you have never had mercies of Him and are yet “in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity.” If you are a child of God, your needs will be as numerous as your moments and you will need to have as many prayers as there are hours! Pray that you may be holy, humble, zealous and patient. Pray that you may have communion with Christ and enter into the banqueting house of His love. Pray for yourself—that you may be an example unto others—that you may honor God, here, and inherit His kingdom hereafter.

In the next place, pray for your *families*; for your children. If they are pious, you can still pray for them that their piety may be real, that they may be upheld in their profession. And if they are ungodly, you have a whole fountain of arguments for prayer. So long as you have a child unpardoned, pray for him! So long as you have a child alive that is saved, pray for him, that he may be kept. You have enough reason to pray for those who have proceeded from your own loins, but if you have no cause to do that, pray for your servants. Will you not stoop to that? Then surely you have not stooped to be saved, for he that is saved knows how to pray for all. Pray for your servants—that they may serve God—that their life in your house may be of use to them. That is an ill house where the servants are not prayed for. I should not like to be waited upon by one for whom I could not pray! Perhaps the day when this world shall perish will be the day unbrightened by a prayer. And perhaps the day when a great misdeed was done by some man was the day when his friends left off praying for him. Pray for your households!

And then pray for the *Church*. Let the minister have a place in your heart. Mention his name at your family altar and in your closet. You expect him to come before you, day after day, to teach you the things of the kingdom. You expect him to exhort and stir up your pure minds by way of remembrance. If he is a true minister, there will be work to be done in this matter. He cannot write his sermon and read it to you. He does not believe Christ said, “Go and *read the gospel* to every creature.” Do you know the cares of a minister? Do you know the trouble he has with his own church—how the erring ones grieve him, how even the right ones vex his spirit by their infirmities—how, when the church is large, there will always be some great trouble in the hearts of some of his people? And he is the reservoir of all—they come to him with all their grief! He is to “weep with them who weep.” And in the pulpit what is his work? God is my witness, I scarcely ever prepare for my pulpit with pleasure—study for the pulpit is to me the most irksome work in the world! I have never come into this house, that I know of, with a smile upon my heart. I may have sometimes gone out with one, but never have I had one when I entered. Preach, preach, twice a day I can and will do. But still there is a travailing in preparation for it and even the utterance is not always accompanied with joy and gladness. God knows that if it were not for the good that we trust is to be accomplished by the preaching of the word, it is no happiness to a man’s life to be well known. It robs him of all comfort to be from morning to night sought for labor, to have no rest for the sole of his feet or for his brain—to be a great religious hack—to bear every burden—to have people asking, as they do in the country, when they need to get into a cart, “Will it hold it?”—Never thinking whether the horse can drag it. To have them asking, “Will you preach at such a place? You are preaching twice, couldn’t you manage to get to such a place and preach again?”

Everyone else has a constitution—the minister has none—until he kills himself and is condemned as imprudent! If you are determined to do your duty in that place to which God has called you, you need the prayers of your people that you may be able to do the work and you will need their abundant prayers that you may be sustained in it! I bless God that I have a valiant corps of men and women who day without night besiege God’s throne on my behalf! I would speak to you again, my brothers and sisters, and beseech you, by our loving days that are past, by all the hard fighting that we have had side by side with each other, not to cease to pray now! The time was when in hours of trouble you and I have bent our knees together in God’s House and we have prayed to God that He would give us a blessing. You remember how great and sore troubles did roll over our head—how men did ride over us. We went through fire and through water and now God has brought us into a large place and so multiplied us—let us not cease to pray! Let us still cry out unto the living God that He may give us a blessing! Oh, may God help me, if you cease to pray for me! Let me know the day and I will cease to preach. Let me know when you intend to cease your prayers and I shall cry, “O my God, give me this day my tomb, and let me slumber in the dust.”

And lastly, let me bid you pray for *the church at large*. This is a happy time we live in. A certain race of croaking souls, who are never pleased with anything, are always crying out about the badness of the times. They cry, “Oh, for the good old times!” Why, these *are* the good old times! Time never was so old as it is now! These are the best times! I think that many an old Puritan would jump out of his grave if he knew what was going on now. If they could have been told of the great movement at Exeter Hall—there is many a man among them who once fought against the Church of England—who would lift his hand to heaven and cry, “My God, I bless You that I see such a day as this!” In these times there is a breaking down of many of the barriers. The bigots are afraid. They are crying out most desperately because they think God’s people will soon love each other too well. They are afraid that the trade of persecution will soon be done with, if we begin to be more and more united. So they are making an outcry and saying, “These are not good times.” But true lovers of God will say they have not lived in better days than these! And they all hopefully look for still greater things. Unless you professors of religion are eminently in earnest prayer, you will disgrace yourselves by neglecting the finest opportunity that men ever had! I think that your fathers who lived in days when great men were upon earth, who preached with much power—I think if they had not prayed, they would have been as unfaithful as you will be—for now the good ship floats upon a flood tide—sleep now and you will not cross the bar at the harbor’s mouth! Never did the sun of prosperity seem to you much more fully on the church during the last 100

years than now. Now is your time—neglect not to sow your seed in this good time of seed-sowing! Neglect not to reap your harvest in these good days when it is ripe! For darker days may come and those of peril, when God shall say, “Because they would not cry to Me, when I stretched out My hands to bless them, therefore will I put away My hands and will no more bless them, until again they shall seek Me.”

And now to close. I have a young man here who has been lately converted. His parents cannot stand him. They entertain the strongest opposition to him, and they threaten him that if he does not leave off praying, they will turn him out of doors. Young man, I have a little story to tell you! There was once a young man in your position—he had begun to pray, and his father knew it. He said to him, “John, you know I am an enemy to religion, and prayer is a thing that shall never be offered in my house.” Still the young man continued in earnest supplication. “Well,” said the father one day, in a hot passion, “you must give up either God or me! I solemnly swear that you shall never darken the threshold of my door again unless you decide that you will give up praying. I give you till tomorrow morning to choose.” The night was spent in prayer by the young disciple. He rose in the morning, sad to be cast away by his father, but resolute in spirit, that come what might, he would serve his God. The father abruptly accosted him—“Well, what is the answer?” “Father,” he said, “I cannot violate my conscience. I cannot forsake my God.” “Leave immediately,” said his father. And the mother stood there. The father’s hard spirit had made hers hard too, and though she might have wept, she concealed her tears. “Leave immediately” he said. Stepping outside the threshold, the young man said, “I wish you would grant me one request before I go. And if you grant me that, I will never trouble you again.” “Well,” said the father, “you shall have anything you like, but mark me, you *go* after you have had that. You shall never have anything again.” “It is,” said the son, “that you and my mother would kneel down and let me pray for you before I go.” Well, they could hardly object to it. The young man was on his knees in a moment, and began to pray with such unction and power, with such evident love to their souls, with such true and divine earnestness, that they both fell flat on the ground, and when the son rose there they were! And the father said, “You need not go, John. Come and stay. Come and stay.” And it was not long before not only he, but the whole of them began to pray, and they were united to a Christian Church.

So, do not give up! Persevere kindly but firmly. It may be that God shall enable you not only to have your own souls saved, but to be the means of bringing your persecuting parents to the foot of the cross. That such may be the case is our earnest prayer. Amen.

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