

PAUL'S FIRST PRAYER

NO. 16

A SERMON
 DELIVERED ON SABBATH MORNING, MARCH 25, 1855,
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 AT EXETER HALL, STRAND.

“For behold, he is praying.”
Acts 9:11.

GOD has many methods of quenching persecution. He will not allow His church to be injured by its enemies, or overwhelmed by its foes. And He is not short of means for turning aside the way of the wicked, or of turning it upside down. In two ways He usually accomplishes His end—sometimes by the confusion of the persecutor and at others in a more blessed manner, by his conversion. Sometimes He confuses and confounds His enemies—He makes the diviner mad. He lets the man who comes against Him be utterly destroyed, allows him to drive on to his own destruction and then, at last, turns round in triumphant derision upon the man who hoped to have said *aha! aha!* to the church of God. But at other times, as in this case, He converts the persecutor. Thus, He transforms the foe into a friend. He makes the man who was a warrior *against* the gospel, a soldier *for* it. Out of darkness He brings forth light. Out of the eater He gets honey, yes, out of stony hearts He raises up children unto Abraham! Such was the case with Saul. A more furious bigot it is impossible to conceive. He had been splattered with the blood of Stephen when they stoned him to death—so officious was he in his cruelty, that the men left their clothes in the charge of a young man named Saul. Living at Jerusalem, in the college of Gamaliel, he constantly came in contact with the disciples of the Man of Nazareth. He laughed at them; he reviled them as they passed along the street; he procured enactments against them, and even put them to death! And now, as a crowning point, this werewolf, having tasted blood, becomes exceedingly mad. He determines to go to Damascus, that he may glut himself with the gore of men and women—that he may bind the Christians, and bring them to Jerusalem—there to suffer what he considered to be a just punishment for their heresy and departure from their ancient religion! But oh, how marvelous was the power of God! Jesus stays this man in his mad career—just as with his lance in rest he was dashing against Christ, Christ met him, unhorsed him, threw him on the ground and questioned him, “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute Me?” He then graciously removed his rebellious heart—gave him a new heart and a right spirit—turned his aim and object—led him to Damascus—laid him prostrate for three days and nights—spoke to him—made mystic sounds go murmuring through his ears—set his whole soul on fire. And when at last he started up from that three day’s trance, and began to pray, then it was that Jesus from heaven descended, came in a vision to Ananias and said—“Arise and go into the street which is called Straight and inquire in the house of Judas for one called Saul, of Tarsus: for, behold, he is praying.”

First, our text was *an announcement*—“Behold, he is praying.” Secondly, it was *an argument*—“*For behold, he is praying.*” Then, to conclude, we will try to make an application of our text to your hearts. Though application is the work of God, alone, we will trust that He will be pleased to make that application while the word is preached this morning.

I. First, here was AN ANNOUNCEMENT—“Go inquire for Saul of Tarsus—for behold, he is praying.” Without any preface, let me say that this was the announcement of a fact which was noticed in heaven, which was joyous to the angels, which was astonishing to Ananias and which was a novelty to Saul, himself!

It was the announcement of *a fact which was noticed in heaven*. Poor Saul had been led to cry for mercy, and the moment he began to pray, God began to hear! Do you not notice, in reading the chapter, what attention God paid to Saul? He knew the street where he lived—“Go to the street that is called *Straight*.” He knew the house where he resided—“Inquire at the *house of Judas*.” He knew his name. It

was *Saul*. He knew the place where he came from—"inquire for Saul of *Tarsus*." And He knew that he had prayed. "Behold, *he is praying*." Oh, it is a glorious fact that prayers are noticed in heaven! The poor broken-hearted sinner climbing up to his chamber, bends his knees, but can only utter his wailing in the language of sighs and tears. Lo, that groan has made all the harps of heaven thrill with music! That tear has been caught by God and put into the vial of heaven, to be perpetually preserved. The suppliant, whose fears prevent his words, will be well understood by the Most High. He may only shed one hasty tear. But "prayer is the falling of a tear." Tears are the diamonds of heaven—sighs are a part of the music of Jehovah's throne. For though prayers are—

*"The simplest form of speech
That infant lips can try";*

they are likewise the—

*"Most sublime strains that reach
The majesty on high."*

Let me dilate on this thought a moment. Prayers are noticed in heaven. Oh, I know what many of you are thinking—you think, "If I turn to God, if I seek Him, surely I am so inconsiderable a being, so guilty and vile, that it cannot be imagined He would take any notice of me." My friends harbor no such heathenish ideas! Our God is no God who sits in one perpetual dream, nor does He clothe Himself in such thick darkness that He cannot see. He is not like Baal, who hears not. True, He may not regard battles. He cares not for the pomp and pageantry of kings. He listens not to the swell of martial music. He regards not the triumph and pride of man—but wherever there is a heart big with sorrow, wherever there is an eye suffused with tears, wherever there is a lip quivering with agony, wherever there is a deep groan, or a penitential sigh—the ears of Jehovah are wide open! He marks it down in the registry of His memory. He puts our prayers, like rose leaves, between the pages of His book of remembrance. And when the volume is opened at last, there shall be a precious fragrance springing up from there; oh, poor sinner of the blackest and vilest character, your prayers are heard, and even now God has said of *you*, "Behold, he is praying." Where was it—in a barn? Where was it—in the closet? Was it at your bedside this morning, or in this hall? Are you now glancing to heaven? Speak poor heart! Did I hear your lips just now mutter out, "God have mercy on me, a sinner"? I tell you, sinner, there is one thing which does outstrip the telegraph. You know we can now send a message and receive an answer in a few moments. But I read of something in the Bible swifter than the electric fluid—"Before they call I will answer, and while they are speaking I will hear." So then, poor sinner, you *are* noticed—yes, you are heard by Him that sits on the throne!

Again, this was the announcement of a *fact joyous to heaven*. Our text is prefaced with, "Behold," for, doubtless, our Savior, Himself, regarded it with joy. Once only do we read of a smile resting on the countenance of Jesus, when lifting up His eyes to heaven, He exclaimed, "I thank You, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because You have hid these things from the wise and prudent and have revealed them unto babes—even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Your sight." The Shepherd of our souls rejoices in the vision of His sheep securely folded. He triumphs in spirit when He brings a wanderer home! I conceive that when He spoke these words to Ananias, one of the smiles of paradise must have shone from His eyes. "Behold," I have won the heart of My enemy. I have saved My persecutor. Even now he is bending the knee at My footstool, "Behold, he is praying." Jesus Himself led the song, rejoicing over the new convert with singing! Jesus Christ was glad and rejoiced more over that lost sheep than over ninety and nine that went not astray. And angels rejoiced, too! Why, when one of God's elect is born, angels stand around his cradle. He grows up and runs into sin, angels follow him. Tracking him all his way, they gaze with sorrow upon his many wanderings. The fair Peri drops a tear whenever that loved one sins. Presently the man is brought under the sound of the gospel. The angel says, "Behold, he begins to *hear*." He waits a little while, the word sinks into his heart, a tear runs down his cheek and at last he cries from his inmost soul, "God have mercy upon me!" Look! The angel claps his wings! Up he flies to heaven and says, "Brethren angels, listen to me—'Behold, he is praying.'" Then they set heaven's bells ringing. They have a jubilee in glory! Again they shout with gladsome voices, for verily I tell

you, "There is joy in heaven among the angels of God over one sinner who repents." They watch us till we pray and when we pray, they say, "Behold, he is praying."

Moreover, my dear friends, there may be other spirits in heaven that rejoice, besides the angels. Those persons are our friends who have gone before us. I have not many relations in heaven, but I have one whom I dearly love, who, I doubt not, often prayed for me. For she nursed me when I was a child and brought me up during part of my infancy and now she sits before the throne in glory—suddenly snatched away. I fancy she looked upon her darling grandson and as she saw him in the ways of sin, of vice and folly, she could not look with sorrow for there are no tears in the eyes of glorified ones. She could not look with regret, because they cannot know such a feeling before the throne of God. But ah, that moment when by sovereign grace, I was compelled to pray, when all alone I bent my knee and wrestled—I think I see her as she said—"Behold, he is praying! Behold, he is praying!" Oh, I can picture her countenance! She seemed to have two heavens for a moment, a double bliss, a heaven in me as well as in herself—when she could say, "Behold, he is praying." Ah, young man, there is your mother walking the golden streets. She is looking down upon you this hour. She nursed you—on her breast you lay when but a child. And she consecrated you to Jesus Christ. From heaven, she has been watching you with that intense anxiety which is compatible with happiness. This morning she is looking upon you. What do you say, young man? Does Christ by His Spirit say in your heart, "Come unto Me"? Do you drop the tear of repentance? I think I see your mother as she cries, "Behold, he is praying!" Once more she bends before the throne of God and says, "I thank You, O You ever gracious one, that he who was my child on earth, has now become *Your* child in light."

But, if there is one in heaven who has more joy than another over the conversion of a sinner, it is a minister, one of God's true ministers. Oh, my hearers, you little think how God's true ministers do love your souls. Perhaps you think it is easy work to stand here and preach to you. God knows, if that were all—it would be easy work. But when we think that when we speak to you, your salvation or damnation in some measure depends upon what we say—when we reflect that if we are unfaithful watchmen, your blood will God require at our hands—oh, good God, when I reflect that I have preached to thousands in my lifetime, many thousands—and have perhaps said many things I ought not to have said, it startles me, it makes me shake and tremble! Luther said he could face his enemies but could not go up his pulpit stairs without his knees knocking together. Preaching is *not* child's play, it is not a thing to be done without labor and anxiety—it is solemn work—it is awful work if you view it in its relation to eternity. Ah, how God's minister prays for you! If you might have listened under the eaves of his chamber window, you would have heard him groaning every Sunday night over his sermons because he had not spoken with more effect. You would have heard him pleading with God, "Who has believed our report? To whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?" Ah, when he observes you, from his rest in heaven—when he sees you *praying*, how he will clap his hands and say, "Behold, the child You have given me! Behold, he is praying!" I am sure when we see one brought to know the Lord, we feel very much like one who has saved a fellow creature from being drowned. There is a poor man in the flood. He is going down, he is sinking. He must be drowned, but I spring in, grasp him firmly, lift him on the shore and lay him on the ground. The physician comes. He looks at him; he puts his hand upon him and says, "I am afraid he is dead." We apply all the means in our power; we do what we can to restore life. I feel I have been that man's deliverer and oh, how I stoop down and put my ear beside his mouth! At last I say, "He breathes! He breathes!" What pleasure there is in that thought! He breathes. There is still life. So when we find a man praying, we shout—he breathes! He is not dead! He is alive! For while a man prays he is not dead in trespasses and sins, but is brought to life, is quickened by the power of the Spirit. "Behold, he is praying." This was joyful news in heaven, as well as being noticed by God.

Then in the next place, this was *an event most astonishing to men*. Ananias lifted up both his hands in amazement. "O my Lord, I should have thought anybody would pray but that man. Is it possible?" I do not know how it is with other ministers but sometimes I look upon such-and-such individuals in the congregation and I say, "Well, they are very hopeful. I think I shall have them. I trust there is a work going on and hope soon to hear them tell what the Lord has done for their souls." Soon, perhaps, I see

nothing of them and miss them altogether. But instead thereof, my good Master sends me one of whom I had no hope—an outcast, a drunk, a reprobate—to the praise of the glory of His grace! Then I lift up my hands in astonishment, thinking, “I should have thought of anybody rather than you.” I remember a circumstance which occurred a little while ago. There was a poor man about 60 years old. He had been a rough sailor, one of the worst men in the village. It was his custom to drink and he seemed to be delighted when he was cursing and swearing. However he came into the chapel one Sunday, when one nearly related to me was preaching from the text concerning Jesus weeping over Jerusalem. And the poor man thought, “What? Did Jesus Christ ever weep over such a wretch as I am?” He thought he was too bad for Christ to care for him. At last he came to the minister and said, “Sir, 60 years have I been sailing under the colors of the devil. It is time I should have a new owner; I want to scuttle the old ship and sink her altogether. Then I shall have a new one and I shall sail under the colors of Prince Immanuel.” Ever since that moment, that man has been a praying character, walking before God in all sincerity. Yet he was the very last man you would have thought of! Somehow God does choose the last men—He does not care for the diamond, but He picks up the stones, for He is able, out of “stones, to raise up children unto Abraham.” God is wiser than the chemist—He not only refines gold, but He transmutes base metal into precious jewels. He takes the filthiest and the vilest and fashions them into glorious beings, makes them saints, whereas they have been sinners and sanctifies them, whereas they have been unholy!

The conversion of Saul was a strange thing. But, beloved, was it stranger that you and I should have been Christians? Let me ask you if anybody had told you, a few years ago, that you would belong to a church and be numbered with the children of God, what would you have said? “Nonsense! I am not one of your canting Methodists! I am not going to have any religion; I love to think and do as I like.” Did not you and I say so? And how on earth did we get *here*? When we look at the change that has passed over us, it appears like a dream! God has left many in our families who were better than we were and why has He chosen us? Oh, is it not strange? Might we not lift up our hands in astonishment, as Ananias did, and say, “Behold, behold, behold, it is a miracle on earth, a wonder in heaven”?

The last thing I have to say here is this—*this fact was a novelty to Saul himself*. “Behold, he is praying.” What is there novel in that? Saul used to go up to the Temple twice a day at the hour of prayer. If you could have accompanied him, you would have heard him speak beautifully, in words like these—“Lord, I thank You I am not as other men are. I am not an extortioner, nor a publican. I fast twice in the week and give tithes of all I possess” and so on. Oh, you might have found him pouring out a fine oration before the throne of God! And yet it says—“Behold, he is praying.” What? Had he never prayed before? No, never. All he had ever done before went for nothing—it was not prayer! I have heard of an old gentleman who was taught, when a child, to pray, “Pray God bless my father and mother,” and he kept on praying the same thing for 70 years when his parents were both dead. After that it pleased God, in His infinite mercy, to touch his heart and he was led to see that, notwithstanding his constancy to his forms, he had not been praying at all. He often said his prayers, but never prayed. So it was with Saul. He had pronounced his lofty orations but they were all good for nothing! He had prayed his long prayers for a pretense. It had all been a failure. Now comes a true petition and it is said, “Behold, he is praying.” Do you see that man trying to obtain a hearing from his Maker? How he stands! He speaks Latin and blank verse before the Almighty's throne. But God sits in calm indifference paying no attention. Then the man tries a different style—procures a book—and bending his knees again—this time he is praying in a delightful *form*, the best old prayer that could ever be put together. But the Most High disregards his empty formalities. At last the poor creature throws the book away, forgets his blank verse and says, “O Lord, hear, for Christ's sake.” “Hear him,” says God, “I have heard him.” There is the mercy you have sought. One hearty *prayer* is better than ten thousand *forms*; one prayer coming from the soul is better than a myriad cold *readings*! As for prayers that spring from the mouth and head only, God abhors them! He loves those that come deep from the heart. Perhaps I would be impudent if I were to say that there are hundreds here, this morning, who never prayed once in their lives. There are some of you who never did. There is one young man over there, who told his parents when he left them that he would always go through his form of prayer every morning and night. But he is ashamed and he has left it off.

Well, young man, what will you do when you come to die? Will you have “the watchword at the gates of death”? Will you “enter heaven by prayer”? No, you will not. You will be driven from God’s presence and be cast away!

II. Secondly, we have here AN ARGUMENT. “*For behold, he is praying.*” It was an argument, first of all, for *Ananias’ safety*. Poor Ananias was afraid to go to Saul. He thought it was very much like stepping into a lion’s den. “If I go to his house,” he thought, “the moment he sees me, he will take me to Jerusalem at once, for I am one of Christ’s disciples. I dare not go.” God says, “Behold, he is praying.” “Well,” says Ananias, “that is enough for me. If he is a praying man, he will not hurt me. If he is a man of real devotion, I am safe.” Be sure you may always trust a praying man! I do not know why it is, but even ungodly men always pay reverence to a sincere Christian! A master likes to have a praying servant even if he does not regard religion himself. He likes to have a pious servant and he will trust him rather than any other. True, there are some of your professedly praying people who have not a bit of prayer in them! But whenever you find a really praying man, trust him with untold gold. For if he really prays, you need not be afraid of him. He who communes with God in secret may be trusted in public. I always feel safe with a man who is a visitor to the mercy seat. I have heard an anecdote of two gentlemen traveling together, somewhere in Switzerland. Presently they come into the midst of the forests and you know the gloomy tales the people tell about the inns there, how dangerous it is to lodge in them. One of them, an infidel, said to the other, who was a Christian, “I don’t like stopping here at all, it is very dangerous indeed.” “Well,” said the other, “let us try.” So they went into a house, but it looked so suspicious that neither of them liked it. And they thought they would prefer being at home in England. Presently the landlord said, “Gentlemen, I always read and pray with my family before going to bed. Will you allow me to do so tonight?” “Yes,” they said “with the greatest pleasure.” When they went upstairs, the infidel said, “I am not at all afraid, now.” “Why?” asked the Christian; “Because our host has prayed!” “Oh,” said the other, “then it seems, after all, you think something of religion—because a man prays, you can go to sleep in his house.” And it was marvelous how both of them did sleep. Sweet dreams they had, for they felt that where the house had been roofed by prayer and walled with devotion, there could not be found a man living that would commit an injury to them. This, then, was an argument to Ananias—that he might go with safety to Saul’s house!

But more than this there was *an argument for Paul’s sincerity*. Secret prayer is one of the best tests of sincere religion. If Jesus had said to Ananias, “Behold, he preaches,” Ananias would have said, “*that* he may do and yet be a deceiver.” If he had said, “He is gone to a meeting of the church,” Ananias would have said, “He may enter there as a wolf in sheep’s clothing.” But when He said, “Behold, he is praying,” that was argument enough! A young person comes and tells me about what he has felt and what he has been doing. At last I say, “Kneel down and pray.” “I would much rather not.” “Never mind, you shall.” Down he falls on his knees, he has hardly a word to say—he begins groaning and crying, and there he kneels on his knees till at last he stammers out, “Lord have mercy upon me a sinner. I am the greatest of sinners. Have mercy upon me!” Then I am a little more satisfied and I say, “I did not mind all your talk, I wanted your prayers.” But oh, if I could follow him home. If I could see him go and pray alone—then I would feel sure. For he who prays in private is a real Christian. The mere reading of a book of daily devotions will not prove you a child of God. If you pray in private, then you have a *sincere* religion. A little religion, if *sincere*, is better than mountains of pretense! Home piety is the best piety. Praying will make you leave off sinning, or sinning will make you leave off praying. Prayer in the heart proves the reality of conversion. A man may be sincere, but sincerely wrong. Paul was sincerely right. “Behold, he is praying,” was the best argument that his religion was right. If anyone should ask me for an epitome of the Christian religion, I would say it is in that one word—“prayer.” If I should be asked, “What will take in the whole of Christian experience?” I would answer, “prayer.” A man must have been convinced of sin before he can pray. He must have had some hope that there was mercy for him before he can pray. In fact, all the Christian virtues are locked up in that word, *prayer*. Do but tell me you are a man of prayer and I will reply at once, “Sir, I have no doubt of the reality, as well as of the sincerity of your religion.”

But one more thought and I will leave this subject. *It was a proof of this man's election*, for you read directly afterwards, "Behold, he is a chosen vessel." I often find people troubling themselves about the doctrine of election. Every now and then I get a letter from somebody or other taking me to task for preaching election. All the answer I can give is, "There it is in the Bible. Go and ask my Master why He put it there. I cannot help it. I am only a serving man and I tell you the message from above. If I were a footman I should not alter my master's message at the door. I happen to be an ambassador of heaven, and I dare not alter the message I have received. If it is wrong, send up to headquarters. There it is, and I cannot alter it." This much let me say in explanation. Some say, "How can I discover whether I am God's elect? I am afraid I am not God's elect." Do you pray? If it can be said, "Behold, he is praying," it can also be said, "Behold, he is a chosen vessel." Have you faith? If so, you are elect. Those are the marks of election. If you have none of these you have no grounds for concluding that you belong to the peculiar people of God. Have you a *desire* to believe? Have you a *wish* to love Christ? Have you the millionth part of a *desire* to come to Christ? And is it a practical desire? Does it lead you to offer earnest, tearful supplication? If so, never be afraid of non-election, for whoever prays with sincerity was ordained of God before the foundation of the world that he should be holy and without blame before Christ in love!

III. Now for the APPLICATION. I have just a word or two with you my dear friends, before I send you away this morning. I regret that I cannot better enter into the subject, but my glorious Master requires of each of us according to what we *have*, not according to what we have *not*. I am deeply conscious that I fail in urging home the truth as solemnly as I ought. Nevertheless, "my work is with God, and my judgment with my God," and the last day shall reveal that my error lay in judgment, but not in sincere affection for souls.

First, allow me to address the children of God. Do you not see, my dear brethren, that the best mark of our being sons of God to be found is in our *devotion*? "Behold, he is praying." Well then, does it not follow, as a natural consequence, that the more we are found in prayer, the brighter will our evidences be? Perhaps you have lost your evidence this morning. You do not know whether you are a child of God or not. I will tell you where you lost your confidence—you lost it in your closet. Whenever a Christian backslides, his wandering commences in his closet. I speak what I have felt. I have often gone back from God—never so as to fall, finally, I know—but I have often lost that sweet savor of His love which I once enjoyed. I have had to cry—

*"Those peaceful hours I once enjoyed.
How sweet their memory still!
But they have left an aching void!
The world can never fill."*

I have gone up to God's house to preach without either fire or energy. I have read the Bible and there has been no light upon it. I have tried to have communion with God, but all has been a failure. Shall I tell where that commenced? It commenced in my closet. I had ceased, in a measure, to pray. Here I stand and confess my faults. I acknowledge that whenever I depart from God it is there it begins. Oh Christians, would you be happy? Be much in prayer! Would you be victorious? Be much in prayer!—

*"Restraining prayer, we cease to fight.
Prayer makes the Christian's armor bright."*

Mrs. Berry used to say, "I would not be hired out of my closet for a thousand worlds." Mr. Jay said, "If the 12 Apostles were living near you, and you had access to them—if this communion drew you from the closet—they would prove a real injury to your souls." Prayer is the ship which brings home the richest freight. It is the soil which yields the most abundant harvest. Brethren, when you rise in the morning, your business so presses you that with a hurried word or two of prayer, down you go into the world! And at night, jaded and tired, you give God the last end of the day. The consequence is that you have no communion with Him. The reason we have not more true religion now is because we have not more prayer. Sirs, I have no opinion of the churches of the present day that do not pray. I go from chapel to chapel in this metropolis, and I see pretty good congregations. But I go to their prayer meetings on a week evening and I see a dozen persons. Can God bless us? Can He pour out His Spirit upon us while

such things as these exist? He could, but it would not be according to the order of His dispensation, for He says, "When Zion travails, she brings forth children." Go to your churches and chapels with this thought—that you need more prayer. Many of you have no business here this morning. You ought to be in your own places of worship. I do not want to steal away the people from other chapels. There are enough to hear me without them. But though you have sinned this morning, hear while you are here, as much to your profit as possible. Go home and say to your minister, "Sir, we must have more prayer." Urge the people to more prayer. Have a prayer meeting, even if you have it all to yourself. And if you are asked how many were present, you can say "Four." "Four? How so?" "Why, there was myself and God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit—and we have had a rich and real communion together." We must have an outpouring of real devotion or else what is to become of many of our churches? Oh, may God awaken us all, and stir us up to pray, for when we pray, we shall be victorious! I would like to take you, this morning, as Samson did the foxes—tie the firebrands of prayer to you—and send you in among the shocks of corn till you burn the whole field up! I would like to make a conflagration by my words and set all the churches on fire till the whole has smoked like a sacrifice to God's throne. If you *pray*, you have proof that you are a Christian! The less you pray, the less reason have you to believe your Christianity. And if you have neglected to pray altogether, then you have ceased to breathe, and you may be afraid that you never did breathe at all.

And now my last word is to the ungodly. Oh, Sirs! I could gladly wish myself anywhere but here. For if it is solemn work to address the godly—how much more when I come to deal with you? We fear lest on the one hand we should so speak to you as to make you trust in your own strength. While on the other hand, we tremble lest we should lull you into the sleep of sloth and security. I believe most of us feel some difficulty as to the most fit manner to preach to you—not that we doubt but that the gospel is to be preached—but our desire is so to do it that we may win your souls. I feel like a watchman, who, while guarding a city, is oppressed with sleep. How earnestly does he strive to awaken himself, while infirmity would overcome him. The remembrance of his responsibility bestirs him. His is not lack of *will*, but of power! And so I hope all the watchmen of the Lord are anxious to be faithful, while at the same time they know their imperfection. Truly the minister of Christ will feel like the old keeper of Ed-dystone lighthouse. Life was failing fast but summoning all his strength, he crept round once more to trim the lights before he died. O may the Holy Spirit enable us to keep the beacon fire blazing, to warn you of the rocks, shoals and quicksand which surround you! And may we always guide you to Jesus and not to free will or creature merit. If my friends knew how anxiously I have sought divine direction in the important matter of preaching to sinners, they would not feel as some of them do—when they fancy I address them wrongly. I want to do as God bids me and if He tells me to speak to the dry bones and they shall live, I must do it, even if it does not please others, for if I don't, I would be condemned in my own conscience and condemned of God. Now with all the solemnity that none can summon, let me say that a prayerless soul is a Christless soul. As the Lord lives, you who never prayed are without God, without hope and strangers from the commonwealth of Israel! You who never know what a groan is, or a falling tear, are destitute of vital godliness. Let me ask you, sirs, whether you have ever thought in what an awful state you are? You are far from God and therefore God is angry with you, for "God is angry with the wicked every day." Oh, sinner! Lift your eyes and behold the frowning countenance of God, for He is angry with you! And I beseech you, as you love yourselves, just for one moment contemplate what will become of you, if living as you are, you should at last die without prayer. Don't think that one prayer on your deathbed will save you. Deathbed prayer is a deathbed farce, generally, and passes for nothing. It is a coin that will not ring in heaven but is stamped by hypocrisy and made of base metal. Take heed, sirs. Let me ask you, if you have never prayed, what will you do? It would be a good thing for you if death were an eternal *sleep*. But it is not. If you find yourself in hell, oh, the racks and pains!

But I will not harrow up your feelings by attempting to describe them. May God grant you never feel the torments of the lost. Only conceive that poor wretch in the flames who is saying, "Oh for one drop of water to cool my parched tongue!" See how his tongue hangs from between his blistered lips! How it tears off the skin and burns the roof of his mouth, as if it were a firebrand. Behold him crying for a drop

of water! I will not picture the scene. Suffice it for me to close up by saying what the hell of hells will be to you, poor sinner—the thought that it is to be *forever*. You will look up there on the throne of God and it shall be written “Forever!” When the damned jingle the burning irons of their torments, they shall cry, “Forever!” When they howl, their echo cries, “Forever!”—

*“‘Forever’ is written on their racks,
‘Forever’ on their chains!
‘Forever’ burns in the fire
‘Forever’ always reigns!”*

Doleful thought! “If I could but get out, then I should be happy. If there were a hope of deliverance, then I might be peaceful, but I am here forever!” Sirs, if you would escape eternal torments, if you would be found among the numbers of the blessed, the road to heaven can only be found by *prayer*—by prayer to Jesus—by prayer for the Spirit—by supplication at His mercy seat. “Turn you, turn you, why will you die, O house of Israel? As I live, says the Lord, I have no pleasure in the death of him that dies, but had rather that he should turn unto Me and live.” “The Lord is gracious and full of compassion.” Let us go to Him and say, “He shall heal our backslidings, He shall love us freely and forgive us graciously, for His Son’s name’s sake.” Oh, if I may but win one soul today, I will go home contented. If I may but gain twenty, then I will rejoice. The more I have, the more crowns I shall wear. Wear? No, I will take them all at once, and cast them at Jesus’ feet, and say, “Not unto me, but unto Your name be all the glory, forever.”—

*“Prayer was appointed to convey
The blessings God designs to give.
Long as they live, should Christians pray,
For only while they pray they live.
And will you still in silence lie,
When Christ stands waiting for your prayer?
My soul, you have a friend on high,
Arise and try your interest there.
‘Tis prayer supports the soul that’s weak,
Though thought is broken, language lame
Pray, if you can, or cannot speak,
But pray with faith in Jesus’ name.”*

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