

THE BELIEVER SINKING IN THE MIRE

NO. 631

A SERMON PREACHED
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 AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

“Deliver me out of the mire and let me not sink.”
Psalm 69:14.

MANY rivers and especially the Nile have on their banks deep deposits of black mud. And when any person seeks to leap on shore, if he should ignorantly or through misfortune spring upon this soft mud he would, unless speedily pulled out, be sucked under until he was utterly swallowed up and suffocated in the mire. Having no handhold or foothold, the more he labored to extricate himself from the thick adhesive mud the deeper he would descend until he would be choked in the filth, unless someone was near to help him out and save him from destruction. True Believers, Beloved, are sometimes in deep mire and in fear of being swallowed up. This was the state and condition of the Psalmist when he wrote this Psalm. He felt that he was sinking and could not deliver himself and therefore he cries unto God for strength in the words of the text, “Deliver me out of the mire and let me not sink.”

Mr. Gadsby, in his “Wanderings,” narrates an incident which, with reflections of his own, I shall read to you at the outset. “Being brought to a stand as just mentioned, I hailed the captain to heave to and take me on board. One of the men was, therefore, sent in the small boat but the river near the western side was so shallow that he could not get the boat within some distance of the bank. He consequently, as is usual in such cases, jumped overboard that he might carry me to the boat on his back.

“No sooner, however, had he sprung from the boat than I heard him scream. I turned to see what was the matter and I found him struggling in the mud. He was sinking as though in quicksand. And the more he struggled the faster and deeper he sank. His fellow boatmen were not slack—they quickly saw the dilemma he was in and two of them dashed in and swam to the small boat. I was almost choked with terror and I breathed, or rather gasped with difficulty. ‘Can they reach the poor fellow?’ I said to myself. ‘If not, he must inevitably be swallowed up alive!’ Now they reach the boat! Now they are near him!

“And now, praise the Lord, he grasps firmly hold—O that death-like grasp!—of the side of the boat! But this was not until he had sunk up to his chest. Seeing him safe, I breathed more freely. And I feel that now, though only relating the circumstance, the excitement has caused an increased and painful action of the heart. How I thought of poor David! Had he really witnessed a similar scene to this, literally, when, speaking of the feelings of his soul spiritually, he said, ‘I sink in deep mire where there is no standing. I am come into deep waters, where the floods overflow me’ (Psa. 69:2)?

“O what an agonizing state to be in! And yet many of my readers, I have no doubt, who never witnessed such a scene literally, know something about it spiritually, as David did, whether he had seen it with his bodily eyes or not. Well might he, in the struggling of his soul, exclaim, ‘Deliver me out of the mire and let me not sink! (14). Let me grasp firmly hold of the ark and be pulled safely on board! Well! Just at the right time, just before the poor fellow’s arms (shall I say his arms of faith?) were disabled, swallowed up—deliverance came!’”

The prayer of our text leads us to three reflections—first, that the true Believer may be in the mire and very near sinking. Secondly, that the true Believer may be in such a condition that God alone can deliver him. And thirdly, that in whatever condition the Believer may be, prayer is forevermore his safe refuge—if a man finds that his own strength fails, he can look up to Him who is an ever present help in time of trouble and cry unto Him, “Deliver me out of the mire and let me not sink.”

I. We commence with the statement that THE TRUE BELIEVER MAY BE IN THE MIRE. Let us consider for a moment three things—What kind of mire the Believer may be brought into. Why God suffers him to be brought there, and how we can prove that he is really and truly a Believer although God suffers him to be brought into the mire. The

truest Believer in the world may be brought into the deep mire of unbelief. Some of us who have preached the Word for years and have been the means of working faith in others and of establishing them in the knowledge of the fundamental doctrines of the Bible have, nevertheless, been the subjects of the most fearful and violent doubts as to the Truth of God and the very Gospel we have preached.

Times may have occurred to the best of God's servants—when they have even doubted the existence of the God whom they have loved to serve—when even the Deity and reality of the Lord Jesus who has rescued them from sin by His precious blood has been a matter of grievous and horrible questioning. Little do people know, who are ignorant of the private history of God's believing people, what struggles they have with their own base-born, wicked unbelief. It is not only Thomas who has said, "Except I put my finger into the print of the nails and thrust my hand into His side, I will not believe."

There have been thousands of eminent saints who have been attacked by unbelief and have been in doubt as to things which they once received as certain Truths of God and which still in their heart of hearts they know to be true. They could have died for those Truths one day. They could have established them beyond all doubt and question the next day. And yet upon the third they might be compelled, through strong temptation, to sit down and with tears streaming from their eyes, cry bitterly unto their Helper, "Oh, God, save me from this accursed unbelief which robs me of every comfort and takes the foundations away and lays my glory in the dust! What can I do? If the foundations are removed, what can the righteous do? O settle my soul upon Your Word and establish me in Your Truth, O You God of Truth."

A man may be a true Believer and yet feel that he is sinking fast into the mire and clay of unbelief as some of us know to our lamentation and dismay. A Believer may be quite settled in his belief of the Gospel and may never doubt the inspiration of Scripture, the Atonement of Christ and all those precious Truths which are commonly received among us and yet, through sin or temptation, or some other cause, he may not have a full assurance of his own interest in those glorious and vital Truths!

A true Believer in Christ, in fact, may often suspect himself to be a hypocrite when he is most sincere—to be an apostate when he is most diligently following the Lord. And he may set himself down as the chief of sinners when the testimony of men and of God is that he is a perfect and an upright man—"one that fears God and eschews evil." A Believer may be in a state of high spiritual health and yet may think himself to be sick unto death! He may be clothed in fair white linen and yet reckon himself to be naked, poor and miserable. He may be rich with all the treasures of his heavenly Father's kingdom and yet may scarcely know where he can find a ready crust with which to supply his present pressing spiritual needs.

There are such things as princes in rags. And there have been such things and probably are now, as princes of the blood-royal peers of God's own realm sitting on the dunghill. Many a justified and accepted saint has had to moan out under a deep sense of sin, just as the poor publican did, "God be merciful to me a sinner." I dare say many of you think that God's ministers never have any question about their interest in Jesus Christ. I wish they never had—Brethren, I wish sincerely *I* never had! It is seldom that I do—very seldom. But there are times when I would change my soul's place with the poorest Believer out of Heaven—when I should be content to sit behind the door of Heaven—if only I might be numbered among God's people!

True Believers sometimes droop into this state—whether they are God's people or not, they cannot tell. Whether their sins are forgiven or not is a matter of solemn enquiry with their souls. Whether they have ever passed from death unto life or not is the great problem which they sit down and earnestly consider. And whether they are God's people or not is a question they have great difficulty in answering. This is deep mire, indeed, for it is woe with another woe at its heels to lose the assurance of one's present salvation.

In addition to this, at times the Lord's chosen are brought into another kind of mire which will never swallow them up, but which may prove a matter of very severe trial to them while they are in it. I mean temporal trouble. When the soul is alarmed about spiritual things and bodily or pecuniary troubles come also, then the sea is boisterous, indeed. It is ill when two seas meet—when Moab and Ammon come against Judah at the same time—when both upper and nether springs appear to be dried up. When God, with both hands, thrusts us into the deep mire.

Certain of my Brethren are frequently in trouble. Their whole life is a floundering out of one slough of despond into another. You have had many losses in business—nothing but losses, perhaps. You have had many crosses, disappoint-

ments, bereavements—nothing prospers with you. Well, Brother, there is this consolation—you are one of a very large family—for many of God’s people pass through just such tribulation. It was said by Matthew Henry, I think, that, “Prosperity was the blessing of the Old Covenant, but that adversity is the peculiar blessing of the New.”

I do not know whether that is true or not, but I do know this, that Christ has said, “In the world you shall have tribulation; but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.” It is no sign, Beloved, that you are not a child of God because you feel the rod—it is rather a token of your being one of the adopted—because you are made to pass under the rod of the Covenant and to utter the prayer of David—“Lord, deliver me out of the deep mire and let me not sink.” You are allowed to plead against the thing you so much fear. You may cry, “Leave me not to become penniless! Leave me not to dishonor my character!” But remember that none of your trials can prove you to be a lost man. Pray, Brother, the prayer of that good man who asked for neither poverty nor riches. Ask that you may have food convenient for you. Pray, “Give me this day my daily bread.” “Deliver me out of the mire and let me not sink.”

I have not come to the blackest mire yet. God’s own people are, at seasons, suffered to sink in the mire of inward corruption. There are times when Believers have such a sight of the little Hell within their own hearts that they are ready to despair of the possibility of their being completely sanctified and made meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light. Our God, at seasons, permits the fountains of the great deep of human depravity to be broken up and then what floods of sin come pouring forth! We little know what lies secreted in our deceitful hearts—envy, blasphemies, murders, lust—there is enough in the heart of any man to make a full-grown devil if restraining Grace did not prevent it.

Today you may have had such enjoyments of the Lord’s Countenance that you have been ready to sing—“You have made my mountain to stand strong. I shall never be moved.” But tomorrow you may have such a sight of self that you may exclaim, “O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?” Remember if you have the nature of God in you, you have also the nature of the old Adam. You are one with Christ and, “as is the heavenly, such are they, also, that are heavenly.” But you are also one with Adam and, “as is the earthy, such are they, also, that are earthy.”

You are to *be* immortal, but you are reminded that you *are* mortal. You are one day to be raised in Glory. But you must remember as long as you are here, the time of Glory is not come. You drag about, to your shame, your weakness, your dishonor and your misery—a body of sin and death. The best of God’s children know this. And I think the holier they are, the more likely they are to feel the conflict within. It is the fashion in our country for men to wear black coats. I suppose it is because they do not show the dirt so much as a white garment—and if we wore white garments the filth would reveal itself and we should have to change them very often.

So, my Brethren, the more a Christian is like his Master, the more clearly he sees his own faults. Oh, Lord, grant us Divine Grace to see much of our sins through the tears of repentance and to see much of the Savior through the eyes of faith—for if we see little of Him we shall get into the plight of David when he was in the deep mire and cried, “Lord, deliver me out of the mire and let me not sink.”

Beloved, it is painful to reflect that the best of God’s people are allowed to fall into the mire of Satanic temptations. There is no knowing what suggestion Satan may thrust into the ears and into the soul of the greatest Believer that Heaven ever made. God may whisper in your ears one day and Satan the next and yet you may be a child of God on both occasions. Oh, Beloved, I dare scarcely say in the midst of this assembly what I know on this point. If I were only to reveal my own struggles and conflicts with Satan I might stagger some of you! But this I know, that no Christian minister will ever be able to enter into the trials and experiences of God’s people unless he has stood foot to foot with the arch Fiend and wrestled with the Prince of Hell.

Martin Luther was right when he said that temptation and adversity were the two best books in his library. He had never written his commentary upon Galatians if he had not been one who was frequently tempted and tossed about by Satan. That fiery, vehement nature of his was like a great coal fire burning up the works of Satan and all that Satan could do only stirred up the flame and caused it to burn more brightly. Satan will suggest not merely little sins, but the worst and foulest of sins to the best of God’s chosen people.

He will even venture in his baseness to urge the man of God to destroy himself when under depression of spirits. And although the saint hates the very thought, yet he may be driven to the verge of it by an influence which he feels that all his

puny might is unable to resist. It is a fearful thing to fight with Apollyon. We shall sing of it in Heaven as one of the greatest and most marvelous mercies of God, that, “He delivered us out of the mouth of our cruel adversary.”

2. Why is it that Believers are allowed to fall into it? The answer is they sometimes get into it through their own sin. It is a chastisement upon them. They were not faithful enough when they walked in the light and, therefore, they are put into the darkness. If they had minded their steps when they were going down the hill they would not have been subject to such afflictions in the valley. Rest assured that a great many of our sorrows are the foul weeds which spring up from the seeds of our own sins.

If you had been a fruitful tree, the pruning knife would not have been so often used. The rod is never taken down from the shelf except when it is absolutely necessary. And we are made to smart bitterly under it because we so greatly require it. God does not punish in a penal sense, but He does chastise. And He generally does it by permitting us to be filled with our own ways. We have to drink the powder of the idol calf which we have, ourselves, set up. We had need to walk with holy jealousy, for we serve a jealous God. O for Grace to serve Him well! Our heavenly Father sends these troubles, or permits them to come, to try our faith. If our faith is worth anything at all it will stand the test.

Superficial brilliance is always afraid of fire, but gold is not—the paste gem dreads to be touched by the diamond—but the true diamond fears no test. People who have a kind of confectionery godliness will wish to be preserved from temptations, for they cannot endure them. But the Christian counts it all joy when he falls into different trials, knowing that “tribulation works patience, and patience, experience, and experience, hope. And hope makes not ashamed because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the holy Spirit which is given unto us.”

My dear Friends, if your faith is only a sunshiny faith, get rid of it! For you may not have many bright days between this and Heaven. If your godliness can only walk with Christ when He wears silver slippers you had better give it up, for Christ very often walks barefoot. It is a poor faith which can only trust God when friends are true, the body full of health and the business profitable. That is true faith which holds by the Lord’s faithfulness when friends are gone, when the body is sick, when our spirits are depressed, when we are driven from the enjoyment of assurances into the desert land and cannot see the light of our Father’s Countenance.

A faith that can say in the midst of the direst trouble, “though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him”—this is Heaven-born faith, indeed! I believe in my Lord because He is a God that cannot lie. He is faithful and true to His every word and, therefore, let the whole creation go to rack and ruin—my faith shall not waver or give up its confidence. The Lord may also let His servants slip into the deep mire to glorify Himself, for He is never, perhaps, more glorified than in the faith of His own people.

When an architect has erected a bridge of whose enormous strength he is well satisfied, he has no objection that it shall be put to any test. “No,” he says, “let the heaviest train pass over it which has ever been dragged by a locomotive. Let the most terrible tempest come that has ever blown from the four winds! I have built my structure in a manner so substantial that the more it is tried and proved, the more you will admire its firmness and completeness. So our gracious God, Beloved, glorifies Himself by permitting His people to be subjected to trials and by enabling them to endure the strain.

We would never know the music of the harp if the strings were left untouched. We would never enjoy the juice of the grape if it were never trod in the winepress. We would never discover the sweet perfume of cinnamon if it were not pressed and beaten. And we would never know the warmth of fire if the coals were not utterly consumed. The excellence of the Christian is brought out by the fire of trouble. The wisdom of the Great Workman and the glory of His skill and power are discovered by the trials through which His vessels of mercy are permitted to pass.

Again, Beloved, trials are permitted to show the natural weakness of the creature that no flesh may glory in the Presence of God. Men of iron nerve are raised up to face all opposition and confront the powers of darkness. Their testimony never falters, their course is true and bright as the sun in the heavens and men rejoice in their light. With faith undaunted they beard the infernal lion in his den and in the day of battle seek the thickest of the fight. All the devils in Hell cannot frighten them and all the foes upon earth cannot stir them from their Divine purpose. They win souls as many as the sands of the sea and their spiritual children are for number, like gravel.

They revive the flame which lingers in the embers of the Church. They set the world on a blaze with heavenly fire. They comfort many and set free thousands of prisoners and yet, suddenly, and it may be in the last hour, their joy de-

parts, their assurance flees and their confidence departs. May not this be necessary that men may not trace the champion's noble bearing to the strength of his natural constitution, but discern that the eternal God was the support of his faith? We might have dreamed that the successful warrior was something different from other men—but when he is brought low we discern clearly that it was distinguishing *Grace* rather than a distinguished *man* which is to be seen and wondered at. The man was but an earthen vessel in which God had put His precious treasure, and He makes the earthiness of the vessel manifest that all men may see that the excellency of the power is not of us, but of God!

There is, perhaps, another reason why God permits His people to sink for a time into deep depression, and that is to make Heaven sweeter when they enter its pearly gates. There must be some shades in the picture to bring out the beauty of the lights. Could we be so supremely blessed in Heaven if we had not known the curse of sin and the sorrow of earth? Rest, rest, rest! In whose ear does that sound most sweet? Not in the ears of the loiterers who scorn all knowledge of the word “toil,” but in the ears of those who are exhausted and fatigued by the labors of the day!

Peace! Is there a man in England who knows the blessedness of that word, “peace”? Yes, there are some. The soldier knows it. He has heard the whiz of the bullet. He has seen the smoke of the battle and the garment stained with blood. And his heart has been stirred by the din, and the shrieks, and the death of the field of fight. To him, peace is a peerless gift. Who will know the peace of Heaven but those who have experienced the warfare of earth and have endured conflicts with sin and the Prince of the power of the air?

Beloved, there must be the foil of sorrow to bring out the bright sparkling of the diamond of Glory. The happiest moments of mere physical pleasure I can remember have been just after a long illness, or some acute pain. When pain is lulled to sleep, how happy one is! I saw a Brother the other day affected by the most painful of all bodily complaints. He was telling me of the sufferings he had endured, and he said, “I am so happy now it is all over.” And I suppose, my Beloved, that Heaven will derive some of its excess of delights—its overflowing joy—from the contrast with the pain and misery and conflict and suffering which we have had to pass through here below.

There will be something better to talk about than *troubles* in Heaven, but the recollection of them may afford a flavor to our happiness which it would have lacked without it. We shall, I doubt not, “with transporting joys, recount the labors of our feet.”

3. These are some of the reasons why God permits His people to sink, for awhile, in the deep mire where there is no standing. But the question is raised, “Are these men who are thus tossed about by doubts and vexed with the great depravity of their hearts, truly, at that time, God's people?” Certainly they are! If they were not God's people the pain of the temptation which they endure could not have reached them. This spot is the spot of God's children and none others are marked with it.

The man who lives in sin as his element never feels the weight of it. A fish may be deep in the sea with thousands of tons of water rolling over his head, but it does not feel the load. But if a man has only a bucketful of water to carry upon his head, he feels the weight of it and rejoices to lose his burden. The sinner whose element is sin laughs at the weight by which a Believer is borne down. Conflicts and pains such as I have been speaking of are not possible to those destitute of spiritual life. Spiritual *life* is the first requisite for spiritual *grief* and spiritual *contrition*. Depend upon it, Beloved, that those who suffer as I have described are the children of God, for they show it.

They show it by the way in which they bear their trials. In their worst times there is always a clear distinction which marks them as separate from other men. If they cannot shout, “victory!” they bear patiently. If they cannot sing unto God with their mouth, yet their hearts bless Him. There is a degree of light even in their worst darkness—it never becomes Egyptian darkness—some one star, at least, gilds the gloom. In the blackest night there is still a candle somewhere or other for the Lord's chosen.

If they get into the mire, they do not perish there. They cry for help when their woes surround them and in the very nick of time, when everything appears to be lost, their heavenly Father hastens to their aid. It is well known to the students of Christian biography that the most eminent of God's saints have had to pass through trials similar to those which we have been describing. Luther was a man of the strongest faith—and yet at times of the faintest hope. He was and he was not, a firm Believer. His faith never wavered as to the truth of the cause which he advocated, but his faith as to his own interest in Christ, seldom, if ever, amounted to full assurance.

The force of his faith spent itself in carrying on with fearful vigor the war against antichrist and error of all shapes. He believed the Truth of God and held right manfully justification by faith. But he was at times very doubtful as to whether he, himself, was justified in Christ Jesus. He believed in salvation by the precious blood of Christ. But, especially at the last, it became a very serious matter with him as to whether *he* had ever been washed in that precious blood. Roman Catholic biographers—who, of course, if they can, will slander him—say that he had doubts as to everything which he preached and that at the last he found his faith was not in accordance with truth.

Not so! No man stuck to his testimony with more tenacity than the great Reformer! But yet I marvel not that they should say so. He never doubted the truth of the things which he preached, but he did doubt his own interest in them frequently. And when he came to die, his testimony, though amply sufficient, was nothing like so brilliant as that of many a poor old woman who has died in a humble cottage, resting upon Jesus.

The poor peasant who knew no more than her Bible was true, was utterly unknown to the Vatican and Fame's trumpet will never resound her name—but yet she entered into eternal peace with far louder shouting of joy than Martin Luther, who shook the world with his thundering valor! "Here lies he that never feared the face of man," is a most proper epitaph for John Knox. And yet at the last, for some hours, he passed through fearful temptation. And what do you suppose it was? The temptation of self-righteousness! The devil could not charge him with sin, for Knox's life had been so straightforward and honest that no man could impugn his motives or deny his Christianity.

And, therefore, the devil came to him in another and more crafty way. He whispered, "John Knox, you have deserved well of your Master! You will get to Heaven well enough through your own merits." It was as hard a struggle as the lion-hearted soldier of the Cross had ever encountered—to hold to his simple faith in Jesus Christ in his hour of peril. Now no Christian man denies that Luther and Knox were men of faith. And yet they were men who had to pray, "Deliver me out of the mire."

I know as I look around on this congregation that some of you can heartily sympathize in the Truth before us. But if there are no others here who can, I can, by God's Grace, most thoroughly say, "I know whom I have believed. And I am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed to Him until that day." But I know, also, that the Christian life is one of stern conflict and battle. And though we do rejoice in the Lord always, yet there are times when it is as hard a work as we can possibly do. No, *harder* work than we can accomplish without the help of the Eternal Spirit—to keep our faith alive at all—for our souls are brought almost to death's door.

I wished to enlarge on this matter for the comfort of those who are tossed to and fro by doubts and fears. I have been attempting to describe the case of those who, for the greater part of their lives have lived in the shade and seen but little of the light of God's Countenance. O may the sun shine on them yet with cheering rays!

II. I turn very briefly to the second point—WHEN BELIEVERS ARE IN SUCH A STATE, THEY KNOW EXPERIMENTALLY THAT NO ONE CAN DELIVER THEM BUT THEIR GOD. The Word of God itself, if not laid home by the Divine Spirit, cannot help them. You may possibly be in such a condition that every promise scowls at you as though it were transformed into a threat. When you turn over the pages of the Book once so full of comfort to you it seems withered into a howling wilderness.

Even those promises which you have been accustomed to offer to others in their time of need appear to shut their doors against you. "No admittance here," says one promise. Unbelief puts its burning finger right across another. Past sin accuses you and cries, "You cannot claim this Word, for your transgression has forfeited it." So you may look through the whole Bible and find nothing upon which your souls may rest. You have noticed strong posts by the sides of rivers to which ships may be safely moored. To get the rope fairly round one of the promises of God will yield good enough moorings for a Christian—but there are times when we have great difficulty in getting the rope round so as to hold fast.

The fault is not in the *promise* but in us. At such seasons the preaching of the Gospel is apparently without power. You say to yourselves, "I do not know how it is, but I do not profit by the ministry as I once did. It used to make me leap for joy when I heard of the precious things of God. But I come away uncomfited from that table which once furnished me a feast of consolation." It is not the fault of the minister—he still, as a good steward, brings forth things new and old. It is not the fault of the Word—it is still milk for babes and strong meat for full-grown men—but you painfully feel that *you* are changed. You lament in words like these, "I go where others go and find no comfort there."

This is a case in which the Holy Spirit must Himself exercise His comforting office. It is only by the effectual application of the Word to your heart by the Holy Spirit that you can be brought out of this deep mire. At such times other Believers cannot aid you. Those about you can prove to you how foolish it is to be in such a state and you can even see your folly for yourself—yet you lie there helpless to lift hand or foot. They tell you of the faithfulness of God. They remind you of the glorious future and point to the land beyond the skies—but you only sigh, “Oh, that I had wings like a dove that I might fly away and be at rest, for there is no rest for me beneath the sky.”

Human sympathy is at a nonplus and all we can do is to weep with you, for we cannot dry your tears. Why does our gracious God permit this? Perhaps it is because you have been living without Him and now He is going to take away everything upon which you have been in the habit of depending. Another reason may be that He wishes to drive you to Himself. Oh, it is a blessed thing to live in the fountainhead! While our skin bottles are full, we are content like Hagar and Ishmael to go into the wilderness. But when those are dry, nothing will serve us but, “You God see me.”

We must then come to the well. We are like the prodigal. We love the swine troughs and forget our father’s house. Remember, we can make swine troughs and husks even out of the forms of religion. Do not misunderstand me. They are blessed things, but we may put them in God’s place and then they are of no value. Anything becomes an idol when it keeps us away from God! Even the bronze serpent is to be despised as Nehustan, a mere piece of brass, if I worship *it* instead of *God*.

The prodigal was never safer than when he was driven to his father’s bosom, because he could find sustenance nowhere else. And, Brothers and Sisters, I think our Lord favors us with a famine in the land that it may make us seek after the Savior more. The best position for a Christian is living wholly and directly on God’s Grace. The best position is still to be where he was at first, “Having nothing and yet possessing all things.” Not building a wooden house on the rock, piling it higher and higher with our own wood, and then getting up to the top and saying, “How high I am!” but having no wood at all—just keeping down on the bare, solid rock—this is wisdom!

When the wind comes and the storm blows, we shall see that the structures which we build will give way and fall to our own damage. But if we stand on the Rock which never shakes, we cannot suffer loss. I pray God that you and I may never get beyond the fountain filled with blood. Stand there, Brothers and Sisters, and be happy! Sinners blood-washed, sinners pleading, sinners accepted, we pray to always feel ourselves to be. Never for a moment think that our standing is in our sanctification, our mortification, our graces, or our feelings—but know that because Christ on Calvary offered a full, free, efficacious Atonement forever—one that believes on Him is, therefore, saved.

We are complete in Him, having nothing of our own to trust, but resting upon the merits of Him whose passion and whose life furnish for us the only sure ground of confidence. Beloved, when we are brought to this, then it is that God comes to help us. We are sure in our poverty to turn to Him afresh with new earnestness. Infants, when they are among strangers, are pleased with little toys and amusements. But when they become hungry, nothing will do for them but their mother’s breast. So it is with a child of God—he may for a time be satisfied and find pleasure in the things of this world—but he only finds lasting and *sure* happiness in being embraced in his Father’s arms.

When the boys walk out with us in fair weather they will run in front of us ever so far, but as soon as they see any danger in the way they quickly return to father’s side. So when everything goes well with us we frequently run a long way from God, but as soon as we are overtaken by trouble, or see a lion in the way, we fly to our heavenly Father. I bless God for the mire and for my sinking in it, when it makes me cry out, “Deliver me, oh my God, out of the deep mire and let me not sink.”

III. In the last place our text shows us that PRAYER IS THE NEVER-FAILING RESORT OF THE CHRISTIAN in any case and in every plight. When you cannot use your sword you may take to the weapon of all-prayer. Your powder may be damp. Your bowstring may be relaxed and your sword may be rusty. Your spear may be bent—but the weapon of all-prayer is never out of order! Men have to sharpen the sword and the spear, but prayer never rusts. There is this blessed thing about prayer—it is a door which none can shut.

Devils may surround you on all sides but there is always one way open, and as long as that road is unobstructed you will not fall into the enemy’s hands. We can never be taken by blockade, escalade, mine or storm so long as heavenly succor can come down to us by Jacob’s ladder to relieve us in the times of our need. Prayer is never forbidden. Remember, Christian, it is never wrong for you to pray, for the gates of Heaven are open day and night. Your prayer is heard in Hea-

ven in the dead of the night, in the midst of your business, in the heat of noonday, or in the shades of evening. You can be in poverty, sickness, obscurity, slander, doubt, or even sin—but it is still true that your God will welcome your prayer at any time and in every place.

Again, prayer is never futile. True prayer is forevermore true power. You may not always get what you ask for, but you shall always have your real needs supplied. When God does not answer His children according to the letter, He does so according to the spirit. If you ask for silver will you be angered because He gives you gold? If you seek bodily health, should you complain, if instead, He makes your sickness turn to the healing of spiritual maladies? Is it not better to have the cross sanctified than to have the cross removed? Was not the Apostle more enriched when God suffered him still to endure the thorn in the flesh and yet said to him, “My strength is sufficient for you”? Better to have all-sufficient Grace than to have the thorn taken away.

What is your condition my Brother, my Sister? Let me entreat you not to cease from prayer. There may be spiritual life in you and yet the devil may tempt you to say, “I cannot pray.” But you *can* pray! You *do* pray! You *must* pray! If you have spiritual life, although you can scarcely bend your knees and are almost afraid to utter words once dear to you, yet your soul desires, pants, hungers, thirsts—and that is the essential of prayer—that is the very marrow and essence of prayer.

Sobs and looks are prayers. And though you say you cannot pray, you *must* pray. You cannot help praying if you are a Christian. “I cannot breathe”—that might be true in a certain sense—I cannot, perhaps, breathe under an asthmatic affection without great difficulty and much pain. But I must breathe if I live! And so with you. You must breathe if you live. And you do pray, *must* pray if you are truly a child of God. At any rate, I pray by the power of God, the Holy Spirit, you may break through those evils, those nets of the devil which hold you in bondage and begin with your whole soul to pray. Never mind what form your prayer takes, but pray.

My dear Brothers and Sisters, everything depends now upon your prayer. If Satan can stop your prayer, he has stripped you of your last resort, your last hope! He will take you by storm if you leave off praying. Pray! If it costs you your life, pray! Go not to your ease and take not your rest until you have prayed. Give no sleep to your eyes till you have prayed. Slumber not until you have had dealings with God in prayer. Not pray? Are you willing to be damned? Not pray? Are you willing to make your bed in Hell? Not pray? Shall devils be your companions? Shall Heaven’s gate be shut against you?

Not pray? Why, my Brothers and Sisters, you must pray now! Oh, send up the prayer from the very bottom of your heart—“O God, deliver me out of the deep mire and let me not sink. Save me, oh, my God! God be merciful to me a sinner.” May God the Holy Spirit sweetly compel you to pray! May He incline, guide, direct and instruct you *how* to pray, that this very night you may offer up a prayer which God in His great goodness will hear and answer!

Pray—“Lord, my soul is besieged. I am shut up by my sins. Oh, God, raise the siege and deliver me from the enemy. Lord, help me with Your almighty arm. Make my extremity Your opportunity. I am a foul beggar sitting on a dunghill. Lord, come and lift me up and put me among the princes and I will praise Your name forever and ever.” May the blessed virgin’s song be yours. “He has put down the mighty from their seat and has exalted the humble and meek. He has filled the hungry with good things and the rich He has sent away empty.”

And may you find in the goodness, and mercy, and loving kindness of God a speedy deliverance out of the deep mire, that you may not sink! May God give a blessing to these words to your comfort! I know some of you will say, “I am not in such a state.” Thank God that you are not! Be grateful for your mercies lest you lose them. Be thankful for your full assurance and your comfortable hope lest those favors should become dim, like dying tapers and waning moons. Rejoice now, oh Christian, as the young man does in his youth and let your heart cheer you in your youthful joy!

But remember, if you are not careful how you walk in these flowery paths. If you become too confident in your own strength or goodness, God will bring you down and make you cry out as sharply and as sorrowfully as David—“Deliver me out of the mire and let me not sink.”

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