

ORDER AND ARGUMENT IN PRAYER

NO. 700

A SERMON
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*“Oh that I knew where I might find Him! That I might come even to His seat!
 I would present my case before Him, and fill my mouth with arguments.”
 Job 23:3, 4.*

IN Job's uttermost extremity he cried after the Lord. The longing desire of an afflicted child of God is once more to see his Father's face. His first prayer is not, "Oh that I might be healed of the disease which now festers in every part of my body!" Nor even, "Oh that I might see my children restored from the jaws of the grave, and my property once more brought from the hand of the spoiler!" No, the first and uppermost cry is, "Oh that I knew where I might find HIM—who is my God! That I might come even to His seat!" God's children run home when the storm comes on. It is the heaven-born instinct of a gracious soul to seek shelter from all ills beneath the wings of Jehovah. "He who has made his refuge God," might serve as the title of a true believer. A hypocrite, when he feels that he has been afflicted by God, resents the infliction and, like a slave, would run from the master who has scourged him; but not so the true heir of heaven, he kisses the hand which smote him, and seeks shelter from the rod in the bosom of that very God who frowned upon him. You will observe that the desire to commune with God is intensified by the failure of all other sources of consolation. When Job first saw his friends at a distance, he may have entertained a hope that their kindly counsel and compassionate tenderness would blunt the edge of his grief; but they had not long spoken before he cried out in bitterness, "Miserable comforters are you all!" They put salt into his wounds; they heaped fuel upon the flame of his sorrow; they added the gall of their upbraiding to the wormwood of his griefs. In the sunshine of his smile they once had longed to sun themselves, and now they dare to cast shadows upon his reputation—most ungenerous and undeserved. Alas for a man when his wine cup mocks him with vinegar, and his pillow pricks him with thorns! The patriarch turned away from his sorry friends and looked up to the celestial throne, just as a traveler turns from his empty skin bottle and betakes himself with all speed to the well. He bids farewell to earth-born hopes, and cries, "Oh that I knew where I might find my God!" My brothers and sisters, nothing teaches us so much the preciousness of the Creator as when we learn the emptiness of all besides. When you have been pierced through and through with the sentence, "Cursed is he who trusts in man, and makes flesh his arm," then will you suck unutterable sweetness from the divine assurance, "Blessed is he who trusts in the Lord, and whose hope the Lord is." Turning away with bitter scorn from earth's hives, where you found no honey, but many sharp stings, you will rejoice in Him whose faithful Word is sweeter than honey or the honeycomb.

It is further observable that though a good man hastens to God in his trouble, and runs with all the more speed because of the unkindness of his fellow men, yet sometimes the gracious soul is left without the comfortable presence of God. This is the worst of all griefs; the text is one of Job's deep groans, far deeper than any which came from him on account of the loss of his children and his property: "Oh that I knew where I might find HIM!" The worst of all losses is to lose the smile of my God. He now had a foretaste of the bitterness of his Redeemer's cry, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" God's presence is always with His people in one sense, as far as secretly sustaining them is concerned, but His manifest presence they do not always enjoy. Like the spouse in the Song, they seek their beloved by night upon their bed, they seek Him but they find Him not; and though they wake and roam through the city, they may not discover Him, and the question may be sadly asked again and again, "Saw you Him whom my soul loves?" You may be beloved of God, and yet have no consciousness of that love in your soul. You may be as dear to His heart as Jesus Christ Himself, and yet for a small moment He may forsake you—and in a little wrath He may hide Himself from you. But, dear friends, at such times the desire of the believing soul gathers yet greater intensity from the fact of God's light being withheld. Instead of saying with proud lips, "Well, if He leaves me I must do without Him; if I cannot have His

comfortable presence I must fight on as best may be,” the soul says, “No, He is my very life; I must have my God. I perish, I sink in deep mire where there is no standing, and nothing but the arm of God can deliver me.” The gracious soul addresses itself with a double zeal to find out God, and sends up its groans, its entreaties, its sobs and sighs to heaven more frequently and fervently, “Oh that I knew where I might find Him!” Distance or labor are as nothing; if the soul only knew where to go, she would soon overleap the distance. She makes no stipulation about mountains or rivers, but vows that if she knew where, she would go, even to His seat. My soul in her hunger would break through stone walls, or scale the battlements of heaven to reach her God, and though there were seven hells between me and Him, yet would I face the flame if I might reach Him—nothing daunted if I had but the prospect of at last standing in His presence and feeling the delight of His love. That seems to me to be the state of mind in which Job pronounced the words before us.

But we cannot stop upon this point, for the object of this morning’s discourse beckons us onward. It appears that Job’s end, in desiring the presence of God, was that he might pray to Him. He had prayed, but he wanted to pray as in God’s presence. He desired to plead as before one whom he knew would hear and help him. He longed to state his own case before the seat of the impartial Judge, before the very face of the all-wise God; he would appeal from the lower courts, where his friends judged unrighteous judgment, to the Court of King’s Bench—the High Court of heaven—there, said he, “I would order my cause before Him, and fill my mouth with arguments.”

In this latter verse Job teaches us how he meant to plead and intercede with God. He does, as it were, reveal the secrets of his closet, and unveils the art of prayer. We are here admitted into the guild of suppliants; we are shown the art and mystery of pleading; we have here taught to us the blessed handicraft and science of prayer, and if we can be bound apprentices to Job this morning, for the next hour, and can have a lesson from Job’s Master, we may acquire no little skill in interceding with God.

There are two things here set forth as necessary in prayer—*ordering of our cause, and filling our mouth with arguments*. We shall speak of those two things, and then if we have rightly learned the lesson, a blessed result will follow.

I. First, IT IS NECESSARY THAT OUR SUIT BE ORDERED BEFORE GOD.

There is a vulgar notion that prayer is a very easy thing, a kind of common business that may be done anywhere, without care or effort. Some think that you have only to take a book down and get through a certain number of very excellent words, and you have prayed and may put the book up again. Others suppose that to use a book is superstitious, and that you ought rather to repeat extemporaneous sentences, sentences which come to your mind with a rush, like a herd of swine or a pack of hounds, and that when you have uttered them with some little attention to what you have said, you have prayed. Now neither of these modes of prayer were adopted by ancient saints. They appear to have thought a great deal more seriously of prayer than many do nowadays. It seems to have been a mighty business with them, a long-practiced exercise in which some of them attained great eminence, and were thereby singularly blest. They reaped great harvests in the field of prayer, and found the mercy seat to be a mine of untold treasures.

The ancient saints were accustomed, with Job, to order their cause before God; that is to say, as a petitioner coming into Court does not come there without thought to state his case on the spur of the moment, but enters into the audience chamber with his suit well prepared, having moreover learned how he ought to behave himself in the presence of the great one to whom he is appealing. It is well to approach the seat of the King of kings as much as possible with premeditation and preparation, knowing what we are about, where we are standing, and what it is which we desire to obtain. In times of peril and distress we may fly to God just as we are, as the dove enters the cleft of the rock, even though her plumes are ruffled; but in ordinary times we should not come with an unprepared spirit, even as a child comes not to his father in the morning till he has washed his face. See yonder priest; he has a sacrifice to offer, but he does not rush into the court of the priests and hack at the bullock with the first pole-axe upon which he can lay his hands, but when he rises he washes his feet at the bronze laver, he puts on his garments, and adorns himself with his priestly vestments—then he comes to the altar with his victim properly divided according to the law of God, and is careful to do according to the command, even to such a simple matter as the placing of the fat, and the liver, and the kidneys, and he takes the blood in a bowl and pours it in an appropriate place at the foot of the altar, not throwing it just as may occur to him, and kindles the fire not with common flame, but with the sacred fire from off the altar. Now this ritual is

all replaced, but the truth which it taught remains the same; our spiritual sacrifices should be offered with holy carefulness. God forbid that our prayer should be a mere leaping out of one's bed and kneeling down, and saying anything that comes to hand; on the contrary, may we wait upon the Lord with holy fear and sacred awe. See how David prayed when God had blessed him—he went in before the Lord. Understand that; he did not stand outside at a distance, but he went in before the Lord and he sat down—for sitting is not a bad posture for prayer—let who will speak against it—and sitting down quietly and calmly before the Lord, he then began to pray, but not until first he had thought over the divine goodness, and so attained to the spirit of prayer. Then by the assistance of the Holy Spirit did he open his mouth.

Oh that we more often sought the Lord in this style! Abraham may serve us as a pattern. He rose up early—here was his willingness; he went three days journey—here was his zeal; he left his servants at the foot of the hill—here was his privacy; he carried the wood and the fire with him—here was his preparation; and lastly he built the altar and laid the wood in order, and then took the knife—here was the devout carefulness of his worship. David puts it, “In the morning will I direct my prayer unto You, and will look up,” which I have frequently explained to you to mean that he marshaled his thoughts like men of war, or that he aimed his prayers like arrows. He did not take the arrow and put it on the bowstring and shoot, and shoot, and shoot anywhere; but after he had taken out the chosen shaft, and fitted it to the string, he took deliberate aim. He looked—looked well—at the white of the target; he kept his eyes fixed on it, directing his prayer, and then drew his bow with all his strength and let the arrow fly; and then, when the shaft had left his hand, what does he say? “I will look up.” He looked up to see where the arrow went, to see what effect it had; for he expected an answer to his prayers, and was not as many who scarcely think of their prayers after they have uttered them. David knew that he had an engagement before him which required all his mental powers; he marshaled up his faculties and went about the work in a workmanlike manner, as one who believed in it and meant to succeed. We should plow carefully and pray carefully. The better the work the more attention it deserves. To be anxious in the shop and thoughtless in the closet is little less than blasphemy, for it is an insinuation that anything will do for God, but the world must have our best.

If any ask what order should be observed in prayer, I am not about to give you a scheme such as many have drawn out, in which adoration, confession, petition, intercession, and ascription are arranged in succession. I am not persuaded that any such order is of divine authority. It is to no mere mechanical order I have been referring, for our prayers will be equally acceptable, and possibly equally proper, in any form; for there are specimens of prayers, in all shapes, in the Old and New Testaments. The true spiritual order of prayer seems to me to consist in something more than mere arrangement. It is most fitting for us first to feel that we are doing something that is real; that we are about to address ourselves to God, whom we cannot see, but who is really present; whom we can neither touch nor hear, nor by our senses can apprehend, but who, nevertheless, is as truly with us as though we were speaking to a friend of flesh and blood like ourselves. Feeling the reality of God's presence, our mind will be led by divine grace into an humble state; we shall feel like Abraham, when he said, “I have taken upon myself to speak unto God, I that am but dust and ashes.” Consequently we shall not deliver ourselves of our prayer as boys repeating their lessons, as a mere matter of rote, much less shall we speak as if we were rabbis instructing our pupils, or as I have heard some do, with the coarseness of a highwayman stopping a person on the road and demanding his purse of him; but we shall be humble, yet bold petitioners, humbly importuning mercy through the Savior's blood. We shall not have the reserve of a slave but the loving reverence of a child, yet not an impudent, impertinent child, but a teachable, obedient child, honoring his Father, and therefore asking earnestly, but with deferential submission to his Father's will. When I feel that I am in the presence of God, and take my rightful position in that presence, the next thing I shall want to recognize will be that I have no right to what I am seeking, and cannot expect to obtain it except as a gift of divine grace, and I must remember that God limits the channel through which He will give me mercy—He will give it to me through His dear Son, and *only* through His Son, Jesus Christ. Let me put myself, then, under the patronage of the great Redeemer; let me feel that now it is no longer I who speak but Christ who speaks with me, and that while I plead, I plead His wounds, His life, His death, His blood—Himself. This is truly getting into order.

The next thing is to consider what I am to ask for. It is most proper in prayer, to aim at great distinctness of supplication. There is much reason to complain of some public prayers, that those who

offer them do not really ask God for anything. I must acknowledge I fear to having so prayed myself, and certainly to having heard many prayers of the kind in which I did not feel that anything was sought for from God—a great deal of very excellent doctrinal and experimental matter uttered, but little real petitioning, and that little in a nebulous kind of state, chaotic and unformed. But it seems to me that prayer should be distinct, the asking for something definitely and distinctly because the mind has realized its distinct need of such a thing, and therefore must plead for it. It is well not to beat round the bush in prayer, but to come directly to the point. I like that prayer of Abraham's, "Oh that Ishmael might live before You!" There is the name and the person prayed for, and the blessing desired, all put in a few words—"Ishmael might live before You!" Many persons would have used a roundabout expression of this kind, "Oh that our beloved offspring might be regarded with the favor which You bear to those who," etc. Say "*Ishmael*," if you mean "Ishmael." Put it in plain words before the Lord. Some people cannot even pray for the minister without using such circular descriptives that you might think it were the parish usher, or somebody whom it did not do to mention too particularly. Why not be distinct, and say what we mean as well as mean what we say? Ordering our cause would bring us to greater distinctness of mind. It is not necessary, my dear brothers and sisters, in the closet to ask for every supposable good thing; it is not necessary to rehearse the catalog of every need that you may have, have had, can have, or shall have. Ask for what you now need, and, as a rule, keep to present needs; ask for your daily bread—what you need now—ask for that. Ask for it plainly, as before God, who does not regard your fine expressions, and to whom your eloquence and oratory will be less than nothing and vanity. You are before the Lord; let your words be few, but let your heart be fervent.

You have not quite completed the ordering when you have asked for what you need through Jesus Christ. There should be a looking round the blessing which you desire, to see whether it is assuredly a fitting thing to ask; for some prayers would never be offered if men did but think. A little reflection would show to us that some things which we desire were better left alone. We may, moreover, have a motive at the bottom of our desire which is not Christ-like—a selfish motive which forgets God's glory, and caters only for our own case and comfort. Now although we may ask for things which are for our profit, yet we must never let our profit interfere in any way with the glory of God. There must be mingled with acceptable prayer the holy salt of submission to the divine will. I like Luther's saying, "Lord, I will have my will of You at this time." "What?" you ask, "You like such an expression as that?" I do, because of the next clause, which was, "I will have my will, for I know *that my will is Your will*." That is well spoken, Luther! But without the last words it would have been wicked presumption. When we are sure that what we ask for is for God's glory, then, if we have power in prayer, we may say, "I will not let You go unless you bless me." We may come to close dealings with God, and like Jacob with the angel, we may even wrestle, and seek to give the angel the fall sooner than be sent away without the benediction. But we must be quite clear, before we come to such terms as those, that what we are seeking is *really for the Master's honor*.

Put these three things together, the deep spirituality which recognizes prayer as being real conversation with the invisible God—much distinctness which is the reality of prayer, asking for what we know we need—and with much fervency, believing the thing to be necessary, and therefore resolving to obtain it if it can be had by prayer, and above all these, complete submission, leaving it still with the Master's will—commingle all these, and you have a clear idea of what it is to order your cause before the Lord.

Still prayer itself is an art which only the Holy Spirit can teach us. He is the giver of all prayer. Pray for prayer—pray till you can pray; pray to be helped to pray, and give not up praying because you cannot pray, for it is when you think you cannot pray that you are most praying; and sometimes when you have no sort of comfort in your supplications, it is then that your heart, all broken and cast down, is really wrestling and truly prevailing with the Most High.

II. The second part of prayer is FILLING THE MOUTH WITH ARGUMENTS—not filling the mouth with many words nor good phrases, nor pretty expressions, but filling the mouth with arguments. The ancient saints were known to argue in prayer. When we come to the gate of mercy forcible arguments are the knocks of the rapper by which the gate is opened.

Why are arguments to be used at all, is the first inquiry; the reply being, Certainly not because God is slow to give, nor because we can change the divine purpose, nor because God needs to be informed of any circumstance with regard to ourselves or of anything in connection with the mercy asked; the

arguments to be used are for our own benefit, not for His. He requires for us to plead with Him, and to bring forth our strong reasons, as Isaiah said, because this will show that we feel the value of the mercy. When a man searches for arguments for a thing it is because he attaches importance to that which he is seeking. Again, our use of arguments teaches us the ground upon which we obtain the blessing. If a man should come with the argument of his own merit, he would never succeed; the successful argument is always founded upon divine grace, and hence the soul so pleading is made to understand intensely that it is by grace and by grace alone that a sinner obtains anything of the Lord. Besides, the use of arguments is intended to stir up our fervency. The man who uses one argument with God will get more force in using the next, and will use the next with still greater power, and the next with still more force. The best prayers I have ever heard in our prayer meetings have been those which have been most full of arguments. Sometimes my soul has been fairly melted down when I have listened to brothers and sisters who have come before God feeling the mercy to be really needed, and that they must have it, for they first pleaded with God to give it for this reason, and then for a second, and then for a third, and then for a fourth and a fifth, until they have awakened the fervency of the entire assembly!

My beloved, there is no need for prayer at all as far as God is concerned, but what a need there is for it on our own account! If we were not compelled to pray, I question whether we could even live as Christians. If God's mercies came to us unasked, they would not be half as useful as they now are, when they have to be sought for; for now we get a double blessing, a blessing in the obtaining, and a blessing in the seeking. The very act of prayer is a blessing. To pray is as it were, to bathe one's self in a cool gentle stream, and so to escape from the heat of earth's summer sun. To pray is to mount on eagle's wings above the clouds and get into the clear heaven where God dwells. To pray is to enter the treasure house of God and to enrich one's self out of an inexhaustible storehouse. To pray is to grasp heaven in one's arms, to embrace the Deity within one's soul, and to feel one's body made a temple of the Holy Spirit. Apart from the answer, prayer is, in itself, a benediction. To pray, my brothers and sisters, is to cast off your burdens, it is to tear away your rags, it is to shake off your diseases, it is to be filled with spiritual vigor, it is to reach the highest point of Christian health. God give us to be much in the holy art of arguing with God in prayer!

The most interesting part of our subject remains; it is a very rapid summary and catalog of a few of the arguments which have been used with great success with God. I cannot give you a full list; that would require a treatise such as Master John Owen might produce. It is well in prayer to plead with Jehovah *His attributes*. Abraham did so when he laid hold upon God's Justice. Sodom was to be pleaded for, and Abraham begins, "Perhaps there are 50 righteous within the city: will You also destroy and not spare the place for the 50 righteous that are therein? That be far from You to do after this manner, to slay the righteous with the wicked: and that the righteous should be as the wicked, that be far from You: shall not the judge of all the earth do right?" Here the wrestling begins. It was a powerful argument by which the patriarch grasped the Lord's left hand, and stopped it just when the thunderbolt was about to fall. But there came a reply to it. It was intimated to him that this would not spare the city, and you notice how the good man, when sorely pressed, retreated by inches; and at last, when he could no longer lay hold upon justice, grasped God's right hand of mercy, and that gave him a wondrous hold when he asked that if there were but 10 righteous there the city might be spared. So you and I may take hold at any time upon the justice, the mercy, the faithfulness, the wisdom, the long-suffering, the tenderness of God, and we shall find every attribute of the Most High to be, as it were, a great battering ram with which we may open the gates of heaven.

Another mighty piece of ordnance in the battle of prayer is *God's promise*. When Jacob was on the other side of the brook Jabbok, and his brother Esau was coming with armed men, he pleaded with God not to allow Esau to destroy the mother and the children, and as a master reason he pleaded, "And You said, Surely I will do you good." Oh the force of that plea—he was holding God to His word: "You said." The attribute is a splendid horn of the altar to lay hold upon, but the *promise*, which has in it the attribute and something more, is yet a mightier holdfast. "You said." Remember how David put it. After Nathan had spoken the promise, David said at the close of his prayer, "Do as You have said." That is a legitimate argument with every honest man. Has God said, and shall *He* not do it? "Let God be true, and every man a liar." Shall not *He* be true? Shall *He* not keep His word? Shall not every word that comes out of His mouth stand fast and be fulfilled? Solomon, at the opening of the temple, used this same mighty plea. He pleads with God to remember the word which He had spoken to his father David, and to

bless that place. When a man gives a promissory note his honor is engaged. He signs his hand and he must discharge it when the due time comes, or else he loses credit. It shall never be said that God dishonors His notes. The credit of the Most High never was impeached, and never shall be. He is punctual to the moment; He never is before His time, but He never is behind it. You shall search this Book through, and you shall compare it with the experience of God's people, and the two tally from the first to the last; and many a hoary patriarch has said with Joshua in his old age, "Not one good thing has failed of all that the Lord God has promised: all has come to pass." My brothers and sisters, if you have a divine promise, you need not plead it with an "if" in it; you may plead with certainty. If for the mercy which you are now asking, you have God's solemnly pledged word, there will scarcely be any room for the caution about submission to His will. You know His will—that will is in the promise—plead it. Do not give Him rest until He fulfills it. He meant to fulfill it, or else He would not have given it. God does not give His word merely to quiet our noise, and to keep us hopeful for a while, with the intention of putting us off at last; but when He speaks, He speaks because He means to act.

A third argument to be used is that employed by Moses—*the great name of God*. How mightily did he argue with God on one occasion upon this ground! "What will You do for Your great name? The Egyptians will say, Because the Lord could not bring them into the land, therefore He slew them in the wilderness." There are some occasions when the name of God is very closely tied up with the history of His people. Sometimes in reliance upon a divine promise, a believer will be led to take a certain course of action. Now, if the Lord should not be as good as His promise, not only is the believer deceived, but the wicked world looking on would say, "Aha! Aha! Where is your God?" Take the case of our respected brother, Mr. Muller, of Bristol. These many years he has declared that God hears prayer, and firm in that conviction he has gone on to build house after house for the maintenance of orphans. Now, I can very well conceive that, if he were driven to a point of need of means for the maintenance of those thousand or 2,000 children, he might very well use the plea, "What will You do for Your great name?" And you, in some severe trouble, when you have fairly received the promise, may say, "Lord, You have said, 'In six troubles I will be with you, and in seven I will not forsake you.' I have told my friends and neighbors that I put my trust in You, and if You do not deliver me now, where is Your name? Arise, O God, and do this thing, lest Your honor be cast into the dust." Coupled with this, we may employ the further argument of *the hard things said by the revilers*. It was well done of Hezekiah, when he took Rabshakeh's letter and spread it before the Lord. Will that help him? It is full of blasphemy, will that help him? "Where are the gods of Arphad and Sepharvaim? Where are the gods of the cities which I have overthrown? Let not Hezekiah deceive you, saying that Jehovah will deliver you." Does that have any effect? Oh yes! It was a blessed thing that Rabshakeh wrote that letter, for it provoked the Lord to help His people. Sometimes the child of God can rejoice when he sees his enemies get thoroughly out of temper and take to reviling. "Now," he says, "they have reviled the Lord Himself; not me alone have they assailed, but the Most High Himself." Now it is no longer the poor insignificant Hezekiah with his little band of soldiers, but it is Jehovah, the King of angels, who has come to fight against Rabshakeh. Now what will you do, O boastful soldier of proud Sennacherib? Shall not you be utterly destroyed, since Jehovah Himself has come into the fray? All the progress that is made by Popery, all the wrong things said by speculative atheists and so on, should be by Christians used as an argument with God why He should help the gospel. "Lord, look how they reproach the gospel of Jesus! Pluck Your right hand out of Your bosom! O God, they defy You! Antichrist thrusts itself into the place where Your Son once was honored, and from the very pulpits where the gospel was once preached, Popery is now declared. Arise, O God, wake up Your zeal, let Your sacred passions burn! Your ancient foe again prevails! Behold the harlot of Babylon once more upon her scarlet-colored beast rides forth in triumph! Come, Jehovah! Come, Jehovah, and once again show what Your bare arm can do!" This is a legitimate mode of pleading with God, for His great name's sake.

So also may we plead *the sorrows of His people*. This is frequently done. Jeremiah is the great master of this art. He says, "Her Nazirites were purer than snow, they were whiter than milk, they were ruddier in body than rubies, their polishing was of sapphire: their visage was blacker than coal." "The precious sons of Zion, comparable to fine gold, how are they esteemed as earthen pitchers, the work of the hands of the potter!" He talks of all their griefs and needs in the siege. He calls upon the Lord to look upon His suffering Zion; and before long his plaintive cries are heard. Nothing is as eloquent with the father as his child's cry, but one thing is mightier still, and that is a moan. When the child is so sick that it is past crying and lies moaning with that kind of moan which indicates extreme suffering, and intense weakness, who can resist that moan?

Ah, and when God's Israel shall be brought very low so that they can scarcely cry but only their moans are heard, then comes the Lord's time of deliverance, and He is sure to show that He loves His people. Dear friends, whenever you, also, are brought into the same condition, you may plead your moans, and when you see a church brought very low, you may use her griefs as an argument why God should return and save the remnant of His people.

Brothers and sisters, it is good to plead *the past* with God. Ah, you experienced people of God, you know how to do this. Here is David's specimen of it: "You *have* been my help. Leave me not, neither forsake me." He pleads God's mercy to him from his youth up. He speaks of being cast upon his God from his very birth, and then he pleads, "Now also, when I am old and gray-headed, O God, forsake me not." Moses also, speaking with God, says, "You *did* bring this people up out of Egypt." As if he would say, "Do not leave Your work unfinished; You have begun to build, complete it. You have fought the first battle, Lord, end the campaign! Go on till You get a complete victory." How often have we cried in our trouble, "Lord, You did deliver me in such-and-such a sharp trial, when it seemed as if no help were near; You have never forsaken me yet. I have set up my Ebenezer in Your name. If You had intended to leave me, why have You showed me such things? Have You brought Your servant to this place to put him to shame?" Brothers and sisters, we have to deal with an unchanging God, who will do in the future what He has done in the past because He never turns from His purpose, and cannot be thwarted in His design. The past thus becomes a very mighty means of winning blessings from Him.

We may even use our own unworthiness as an argument with God. "Out of the eater comes forth meat, and out of the strong comes forth sweetness." David in one place pleads thus: "Lord, have mercy upon my iniquity, for it is great." That is a very singular mode of reasoning, but being interpreted it means, "Lord, why should You go about doing little things? You are a great God, and here is a great sinner; here is a fitness in me for the display of Your grace. The greatness of my sin makes me a platform for the greatness of Your mercy. Let the greatness of Your love be seen in me." Moses seems to have the same on his mind when he asks God to show His great power in sparing His sinful people. The power with which God restrains Himself is great indeed. O brothers and sisters, there is such a thing as creeping down at the foot of the throne, crouching low and crying, "O God, break me not—I am a bruised reed. Oh! Tread not on my little life, it is now but as the smoking flax. Will You hunt me? Will You come out, as David said, 'after a dead dog, after a flea'? Will you pursue me as a leaf that is blown in the tempest? Will you watch me, as Job said, as though I were a vast sea, or a great whale? No, but because I am so little, and because the greatness of Your mercy can be shown in one so insignificant and yet so vile, therefore, O God, have mercy upon me."

There was once an occasion when the very Godhead of Jehovah made a triumphant plea for the prophet Elijah. On that august occasion when he had bid his adversaries see whether their god could answer them by fire, you can little guess the excitement there must have been that day in the prophet's mind. With what stern sarcasm did he say, "Cry aloud: for he is a god! Either he is talking, or he is pursuing, or he is in a journey, or perhaps he sleeps, and must be awakened." And as they cut themselves with knives, and leaped upon the altar, oh the scorn with which that man of God must have looked down upon their impotent exertions, and their earnest but useless cries! But think of how his heart must have palpitated, if it had not been for the strength of his faith, when he repaired the altar of God that was broken down, and laid the wood in order, and killed the bullock. Hear him cry, "Pour water on it. You shall not suspect me of concealing fire; pour water on the victim." When they had done so, he bids them, "Do it a second time." And they did it a second time, and then he says, "Do it a third time." And when it was all covered with water, soaked and saturated through, then he stands up and cries to God, "O God, let it be known that You only are God." Here everything was put to the test. Jehovah's own *existence* was now put, as it were, at stake, before the eyes of men by this bold prophet. And how well the prophet was heard! Down came the fire and devoured not only the sacrifice, but even the wood and the stones, and even the very water that was in the trenches, for Jehovah God had answered His servant's prayer. We sometimes may do the same, and say unto Him, "Oh, by Your Deity, by Your existence, if indeed you are God, now show Yourself for the help of Your people!"

Lastly, the grand Christian argument is *the sufferings, the death, the merit, the intercession of Christ Jesus*. Beloved, I am afraid we do not understand what it is that we have at our command when we are allowed to plead with God for Christ's sake. I met with this thought the other day: it was somewhat new to me, but I believe it ought not to have been. When we ask God to hear us, pleading Christ's name, we usually mean, "O Lord, Your dear Son deserves this of You; do this unto me because of what He merits." But if we knew it we might go farther. Supposing you should say to me, you who keep a warehouse in the city, "Sir, call at my office, and use my name, and say that they are to give you such a thing." I should go in and use your name, and I should obtain my request as a matter of right and a matter of necessity. This is virtually

what Jesus Christ says to us. “If you need anything of God, all that the Father has belongs to Me; go and use My name.” Suppose you should give a man your checkbook signed with your own name and left blank, to be filled up as he chose—that would be very nearly what Jesus has done in these words, “If you ask anything in My name, I will give it you.” If I had a good name at the bottom of the check, I would be sure that I would get it cashed when I went to the banker with it; so when you have got Christ’s name, to whom the very Justice of God has become a debtor, and whose merits have claims with the Most High, when you have Christ’s name there is no need to speak with fear and trembling and bated breath. Oh, waver not and let not faith stagger! When you plead the name of Christ you plead that which shakes the gates of hell, and which the hosts of heaven obey, and God Himself feels the sacred power of that blessed plea!

Brothers and sisters, you would do better if you sometimes thought more in your prayers of Christ’s griefs and groans. Bring before the Lord His wounds, remind the Lord of His cries, make the groans of Jesus cry again from Gethsemane, and His blood speak again from that frozen Calvary. Speak out and tell the Lord that with such griefs, and cries, and groans to plead, you will not be denied. Such arguments as these will honor God.

III. If the Holy Spirit shall teach us how to order our cause, and how to fill our mouth with arguments, the result shall be that **WE SHALL HAVE OUR MOUTH FILLED WITH PRAISES**. The man who has his mouth full of arguments in prayer shall soon have his mouth full of benedictions in answer to prayer. Dear friend, you have your mouth full this morning, have you? What of? Full of complaining? Pray the Lord to rinse your mouth out of that black stuff, for it will little avail you, and it will be bitter in your heart one of these days. Oh, have your mouth full of prayer, full of it, full of arguments so that there is room for nothing else. Then come with this blessed mouthful, and you shall soon go away with whatever you have asked of God. Only delight yourself in Him, and He will give you the desire of your heart.

It is said—I know not how truly—that the explanation of the text, “Open your mouth wide and I will fill it,” may be found in a very singular Oriental custom. It is said that not many years ago—I remember the circumstance being reported—the King of Persia ordered the chief of his nobility who had done something or other which greatly gratified him, to open his mouth, and when he had done so he began to put into his mouth pearls, diamonds, rubies, and emeralds, till he had filled it as full as it could be, and then he bade him go his way. This is said to have been occasionally done in Oriental Courts towards great favorites. Now certainly, whether that is an explanation of the text or not, it is an illustration of it. God says, “Open your mouth with arguments,” and then He will fill it with priceless mercies, gems unspeakably valuable. Would not a man open his mouth wide when he had to have it filled in such a style? Surely the most simple-minded among you would be wise enough for that. Oh, let us, then, open wide our mouth when we have to plead with God. Our needs are great, let our pleas be great, and the supply will be great also. You are not straitened in Him; you are straitened in your own heart. The Lord give you large mouths in prayer, great potency, not in the use of language, but in employing arguments.

What I have been speaking to the Christian is applicable in great measure to the unconverted, too. God give you to see the force of it, and to fly in humble prayer to the Lord Jesus Christ and to find eternal life in Him.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON——NUMBERS 14:1-21.

Adapted from *The C. H. Spurgeon Collection*, Version 1.0, Ages Software.

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