

INQUIRE OF THE LORD

NO. 1304

A SERMON
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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

“Thus says the Lord God, I will yet for this be inquired of by the house of Israel, to do it for them; I will increase them with men like a flock. As the Holy flock, as the flock of Jerusalem in her solemn feasts; so shall the waste cities be filled with flocks of men: and they shall know that I am the Lord.”
Ezekiel 36:37, 38.

MULTIPLICATION is a very ancient form of blessing. The first benediction pronounced upon man was of this sort, for we read in the first chapter of Genesis, “And God blessed them, and God said unto them: Be fruitful and multiply and replenish the earth.” That same blessing was pronounced, again, when God accepted His servant Noah, and entered into covenant with him. We read in Genesis 9:1 that “God blessed Noah and his sons and said unto them, be fruitful and multiply and replenish the earth.” This also constituted a main part of the blessing promised to faithful Abraham. In Genesis 22:17, and many other places, we read to this effect, “In blessing I will bless you, and in multiplying I will multiply your seed as the stars of heaven, and as the sand which is upon the seashore, and your seed shall possess the gate of his enemies.” This was the blessing of God’s chosen people, a blessing which all the malice of Pharaoh could not turn aside, for the more the Israelites were oppressed, the more they multiplied. David, in the 107th Psalm uses the expression, “He blesses them, also, so that they are multiplied greatly” (v 38), so that, clearly, increase of numbers in families and nations was anciently regarded as a token of divine favor.

In a spiritual sense this is the blessing of the church of God. When the church is visited by the power of the Holy Spirit, she is increased on every side. When a church, in the midst of a vast population, remains stationary in numbers, or even becomes smaller, no man can see in such a condition the marks of God’s blessing. Certainly it would be a novel sort of benediction, for the first blessing, the blessing of Pentecost, resulted in 3,000 being added to the church in one day! And we find afterwards that, “The Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.” We read in the Acts of the Apostles that the churches, “walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, were multiplied.” Ever since those early days, when the Lord has been with His people, they have increased in numbers. Their children have sprung up as among the grass and as willows by the water courses. When they have been “diminished and brought low,” it has been because they have departed from the truth of God or lost their first love. The result is the clearness of gospel testimony has been dimmed, spirituality has been at a low ebb, the Holy Spirit has been despised and He has suspended His operations—and the church has dwindled down till she has had little more than a name to live. But as soon as the Lord has returned to her, she has become a fruitful mother and her children have cried out, “the place is too strait for us, give place to us that we may dwell.” When the Lord has sent forth His power with the preaching of the gospel, converts have been as innumerable as the drops of the dew and as the sands upon the seashore! It is plain that one of the blessings which we, as a church, should seek with all our hearts is that of continual increase. The entire church of God should look for the daily multiplication of the spiritual seed. We have the promise of it in the text, but there is appended to it this condition, “I will yet for this be inquired of by the house of Israel to do it for them: I will increase them with men like a flock.” Every true Christian desires to see the church increase. At any rate, I should pity the man who thinks himself a Christian and yet has no such wish. “Let the whole earth be filled with His glory,” is the natural aspiration of every child of God! And if any man has persuaded himself that he *is* a child of God and yet does not desire to see the glory of the Lord made manifest by the conversion of multitudes, I pity the condition of his heart and of his understanding. I trust we all feel the missionary spirit. I trust we all long to see the kingdom

of the Lord come and to see the converts in Zion multiplied. But God has appended to the granting of our desire that we should *pray* for it—we must plead and inquire—or else the increase will be withheld.

Why has the Lord thus made prayer the necessary prelude to blessing? He has done so in great *mercy* to our souls. The Lord knows how beneficial it is to us to be much in prayer, and therefore, He makes it easy for us to draw near to Him. He affords us a multitude of reasons for approaching the mercy seat and gives us errands which may be used as arguments for frequent petitioning. When one knocks at a man's door it is a good thing to have some business to do, for then one knocks boldly. If the porter opens and inquires, "Why did you come here?" we can reply, "Good sir, I came on an important errand," and so we are bold to remain at the door. Now, as the Lord loves to commune with His people, He takes care to give them errands upon which they must come to Him. We need never be afraid that we shall be interrogated at the gate of mercy and this stern question put, "What are you doing here?" for we have always some reason for praying! Indeed, every promise is turned into a reason for prayer, because the promise is not to be granted to us till we have pleaded it at the mercy seat!

Moreover, if I may say so, God has, in mercy, *compelled* us to prayer by making the pleading necessary for the blessing. We must pray! We are unblessed unless we pray, and therefore, our necessities drive us to the mercy seat. Though we may be so low in grace and so unspiritual that we may feel little positive enjoyment, for the moment, in prayer, yet pray we must. A sacred compulsion lies upon us arising from our vast necessities. We thank God, then, that He gives us reasons for coming, yes, lays a stress upon us so that we are compelled to draw near unto Him. Now, let the desire that the church should be increased, which, as I have already said, dwells in the bosom of every child of God, act as a mighty impulse to drive us to earnest, prevailing prayer, for if we are driven to this, the church shall be multiplied exceedingly.

This is the object of the discourse of this morning. O Spirit of grace and supplications, be now upon us that we may be saturated with the spirit of prayer! I shall thus speak upon the text—*why should we awaken ourselves to the inquiry of which the text speaks?* "For this will I be inquired of." Next, *how should such a duty as this be performed?* The text will afford us a guide. And, thirdly, *on what ground can any Christian be excused from the duty of uniting with his brothers and sisters in inquiring at the hand of the Lord for a blessing?*

I. WHY SHOULD WE AWAKEN OURSELVES TO THIS INQUIRY AT THE HANDS OF THE LORD? I do not put this question to you because I think that many of you need instruction as to the necessity for prayer, but because it is good to stir up your pure minds by way of remembrance upon this point. The first reason I shall give is this, because *it is a great privilege to be allowed to inquire at the hands of the Lord.* You will see this very vividly if you turn to the 20th chapter of this prophecy, and read the third verse, "Son of man, speak unto the elders of Israel, and say unto them, Thus says the Lord God, Are you come to inquire of Me? As I live, says the Lord God, I will not be inquired of by you." Look again at the 31st verse of the same chapter, "For when you offer your gifts, when you make your sons to pass through the fire, you pollute yourselves with all your idols, even unto this day: and shall I be inquired of by you, O house of Israel? As I live, says the Lord God, I will not be inquired of by you." What a solemn curse, to be denied an audience with God! How terrible a punishment it is when God shuts the gates of prayer and declares, "I will not be inquired of by you: when you spread forth your hands I will hide My face from you; yes, when you make many prayers I will not hear." A people may get into such a condition of sin, such a willful state of alienation from God, and disobedience to His commands, that He may say, "I will not be inquired of by you." Now, suppose for a moment that it were my painful duty to stand here and say, "Brothers and sisters, it is of no use our praying. The mercy seat has been abolished! God, in His anger, has bid the Mediator lay aside His office, and supplication is no longer to be heard." What wringing of hands, what weeping of hearts as well as eyes if it were, indeed, true that prayer was denied to the people of God! It was a fair token for good when Ezekiel was bid to say that God had now taken away the curse from His people. And though He had said earlier, "I will not be inquired of by you," yet now, under the covenant of grace, having forgiven their sins, He mercifully proclaimed, "Thus says the Lord, For this will I be inquired of by the house of Israel to do it for them." As you would be struck with horror if you were forbidden to pray, so I beseech you use the privilege of prayer while you may. If only some half dozen men had permission to speak into the ear of God, how you would venerate them! How you would wish to be one of their number! If a small chosen band were

set apart who, alone, might ask in faith—and to whom, alone, the promise would be fulfilled, “Ask what you will and it shall be done unto you”—how would you envy them their high privilege! Since, then, at this time you are *all*, if you are the people of God, made to be a royal priesthood and the mercy seat is open to every believer, take care that you do not despise your birthright. To each one of you the promise is given, “He that seeks finds, and to him that knocks it shall be opened.” Is not this sufficient reason why we should awake ourselves to use the privilege which the Lord accords us?

Secondly, *prayer is also to be looked upon as a precious gift of the Spirit of God as well as a great privilege.* Wherever the spirit of prayer exists, it is worked in the heart by the Holy Spirit Himself. And when the text says, “For this will I be inquired of,” it is a promise that men *shall* inquire! It is by virtue of covenant promises and covenant grace that men are made to pray, for the Lord has said, “I will pour out upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications.” Every child of God who understands anything knows that real prayer is “the breath of God in man returning from where it came.” It first comes *from* God, and then it goes back to God. The Spirit knows what the mind of God is and He writes the mind of God upon our mind. And thus the desire of the believer is the transcript of the decree of God, and therefore the success of prayer. Well, now, brothers and sisters, if united, earnest, hearty inquiry of the Lord is a covenant *gift* and a work of the Spirit, we dare not despise it, but we should earnestly seek after it! When we obtain a measure of prayerfulness, we ought to cultivate it and seek to make it grow abundantly. Covenant gifts are always to be earnestly coveted, for they are “the best gifts.” Remember what blood it was which sealed that covenant and made it sure to all the elect! You cannot look upon one item of the inheritance which the covenant entails upon the saints without feeling that it cost the Redeemer His heart’s blood. Forsake not, then, the assembling of yourselves together in prayer as the manner of some is! Neither neglect the mercy seat in private, nor fail to inquire at the Lord’s hand, for supplication is a covenant gift, and must not be despised by any heir of heaven.

These are two forcible arguments, but here is another. In the third place we must pray because *it is a necessary work in order to obtain the blessing.* The church of God is to be multiplied, but, “Thus says the Lord God, I will yet for this be inquired of.” Remember that this is virtually written at the bottom of every promise. God said, “I will do this or that,” but it is understood that *for* this He will be *inquired of*. Doubtless we receive many unasked for favors, but the rule of the kingdom is, “He that asks, receives.” This rule applies even to the King of the kingdom, Himself—“Ask of Me,” said God to His own Son, “and I will give You the heathen for Your inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for Your possession.” I must, then, brothers and sisters, exhort you to be much in inquiring at the Lord’s hands, because countless blessings are suspended upon the exercise of prayer. Imagine, for a moment, that these blessings should not come. Suppose that month after month the particular blessing of the text should be withheld. Into what a state of mind would every earnest Christian be brought! No increase—we come to the Communion Table but report no additions. No need to hold church meetings, for there are no confessions of faith to be heard and no converts are coming forward to tell of the power of divine Love! Suppose that such a state of stagnation should continue month after month with us! *And why shouldn’t it?* It has done so with many others. Then as one after another of the ripe children of God went to heaven, there would be gaps in the church roll and none to replace them. There would be none to be baptized for the dead—none to stand in those places in the ranks from which the pious dead have been removed. May these eyes never look on such a calamity! May this tongue be spending its strength among the choirs above long before such a night shall settle down! You may well write, “Ichabod,” across the fore-front of this house of prayer whenever that shall be, for the glory will have departed! Up to this moment we have never had to sigh and cry because the Lord has left us without an increase. But only suppose that the benediction should be withdrawn. *You can cause* it to be withdrawn, if you will, by ceasing prayer. Only let the cry which goes up to God continually from thousands of earnest hearts cease for a while and it will be a token that the *blessing* has also ceased! Only as long as there shall be this inquiring at the hand of the Lord can we expect that He will do as He has done, namely, multiply us with men as with a flock. Inquire, therefore, eagerly, because the blessing is suspended on it.

Next, we ought to have much of this inquiry because *it is a business which is, above all others, remunerative.* Look at the text—“I will yet for this be inquired of by the house of Israel, to do it for them; I will increase them with men like a flock.” That is a beautiful idea of a multitude. You have, perhaps,

seen an immense flock, a teeming concourse of congregated life. Such shall the increase of the church be! But then it is added, to enhance the blessing, "As the holy flock, as the flock of Jerusalem in her solemn feasts." This, to the Jewish mind, conveyed a great idea of numbers! At the three great feasts of Pentecost, the Passover and the Feast of Tabernacles, the Israelites were accustomed to offer sacrifices in vast numbers, and therefore, lambs and sheep were brought into Jerusalem in such enormous numbers that without a book before me, I should not like to mention the figures which have been put down by Josephus and others. We read of Solomon's offering, "an hundred and twenty thousand sheep." And of 17,000 sheep offered in a single day in Hezekiah's time! We may, therefore, imagine what the need was in our Savior's day that there should be a sheep market by the Pool of Bethesda, for there would be need of immense pens for such numerous flocks. Then might the city be described in the language of Isaiah when he said, "All the flocks of Kedar shall be gathered together unto you, the rams of Nebaioth shall minister unto you; they shall come up with acceptance upon My altar." Now, said the Lord, I will not only multiply you as the sheep are multiplied upon Sharon and Carmel, but as the flocks in Jerusalem when they come together from every quarter on solemn feast days, by hundreds and by thousands! You shall ask, "Who are these that fly as a cloud and as the doves to their windows?" The Lord will multiply the people beyond all count! There is this additional beauty about the promise, that the sheep which were brought to Jerusalem on the solemn feasts were not only numerous, but they were the best sheep in the land because no animal could be offered to God which had any blemish. The priests were peculiarly careful to select the lambs for the Passover and the sheep for the sacrifice. And they were always the pick of the flock, the choice sheep of all the flocks of Palestine. What a mercy when the Lord multiplies the church with a holy flock, as the flock of Jerusalem on her solemn feast days! Then, not only were they the choice of the flock, but they were all consecrated to God, for they were brought to Jerusalem, on purpose, to be sacrificed. O happy church which receives a host of self-sacrificing members who do not come to the church in name, only, but to present their bodies a living sacrifice unto God—to place body, soul and spirit at the feet of Jesus, and say, "Yours are we, Son of David, and all that we have."

See, then, what can be had by inquiring for it! "For *this* will I be inquired of." And what is the, "this," which is spoken of? Why that God will give us a numerous people, a choice people, His own elect and they shall all be consecrated unto Himself! They shall give themselves, first, to the Lord, and afterwards to us by the Word of God. This is to be had by praying for it! Ah, my Lord, how foolish are we not to pray more! Your church has her societies, her agencies and so on, and she has, perhaps, looked to these more than to You. But You are our battle-ax and weapons of war! You can multiply the people and increase the joy! You can fill the quiver of the church with spiritual children and thus make her blessed! To You, only, can we look for this favor! My soul, wait only upon God, for my expectation is from Him. The Lord is a man of war, the Lord is His name! His right hand and His holy arm have gotten Him the victory. Therefore, O house of Israel, inquire at the hands of the Lord and a boundless blessing shall come!

I don't think I need to say that it is necessary for us to pray, because *the results of prayer, as I have already described them, are such as greatly glorify God*. Kindly read the last sentence of the text. It is important—"And they shall know that I am the Lord." When a church is largely increased with choice persons thoroughly consecrated, then the church knows, anew, that there is a God in Israel! The world, also, opens its eyes with wonder and admits that there is something in prayer, after all! When the kingdom of God is largely increased in answer to prayer, there is a wonderful power abroad to answer the arguments of skeptics and to silence the ribaldry of ungodly tongues. "This is the finger of God," they say. How bitterly they ridiculed Whitefield and Wesley when they first begun to preach the blessed gospel! They were fanatics and enthusiasts, disturbing the peace of the land! They were Jesuits, Jacobites and I do not know what they were *not*—but everything conceivable that is bad! But when the Lord put power into these men, and multiplied their adherents by tens of thousands, then presently the world changed its tune and dreaded and feared those whom they had formerly despised. So it is now! If we do not pray, if we grow cold in heart and the blessing is withdrawn, then the worldly wise begin to say, "It is an old, effete doctrine, proclaimed by the last of the Puritans—it is dying out." But as soon as ever they see God blessing us, the multitudes coming together and the church growing to be a power in the land, they like it none the better, but they are obliged to respect it! Oh, that the Lord would stir you up as a church to pray and do the same with all the churches of the land! This would smite His enemies upon

the cheekbone and silence His adversaries! This would baffle the scorner, infidel, the harlot, ritualism, and make both skepticism and superstition acknowledge that in the grand old gospel of Jesus there still resides the omnipotence of the Lord God.

II. Secondly, let us answer the question—HOW SHOULD THIS DUTY BE PERFORMED? First, it should be *by the entire body of the church*. Let us turn to our Bibles and read the text again—“For this will I be inquired of by”—By the ministers? By the elders? By the little number of good people who always come together to pray? Look! Look carefully! “*By the house of Israel.*” That is by the *whole company* of the Lord’s people! To obtain a great increase there must be *unanimous* prayer—prayer from the whole house of Israel! Everyone must join without exception. Where two or three are met together there will be an answer of peace. The prayer of one prevails. But if ever the house of Israel, the whole company of the faithful, shall get together in prayer, ah, then we shall see the multiplication of saints as the flock of Jerusalem on her solemn feasts! But it will not be till then. When Israel was defeated at Ai, one of the reasons of their failure was that there was an abominable thing in the tent of Achan. But another cause of defeat was this that they said, “Let not all the people labor there.” A part of the people were to go and take Ai, and the rest were to lie at ease. The church of God will always have ill times so long as a few people are left to do what should be done by all the redeemed. The whole house of Israel must besiege Ai, if Ai is to be taken! The whole army of the living God must bend the knees together and plead with God if any great victory is to be achieved.

Next, the successful way to inquire of the Lord is for the church to *take personal interest in the matter*. “Thus said the Lord God; I will yet for this be inquired of by the house of Israel, to do it *for them*.” When the people feel that the conversion of souls is their own personal affair. When the Sunday school teachers feel that the multiplication of the church should be something done by them. And when each Christian laborer feels that he has a personal interest in the saving of souls, then will the Lord’s work be done on a great scale! Brothers and sisters, when the case of poor sinners becomes *our* case and our heart cries, “I will break unless those souls are saved,” then we are sure to succeed! If the sinner will not repent, let us break *our* hearts about him. Let us go and tell the Lord his sins and mourn over them as if they were our own! If men will not believe, let us, by faith, bring them before God and plead His promise for *them*. If we cannot get them to pray, let us pray *for* them, and intercede on their behalf—and in answer to *our* repentance they shall be made to repent! In answer to *our* faith they shall be led to believe! And in reply to *our* prayers they shall be moved to pray! The Lord says He will do it, but He will have us seek it as a *personal* favor, that thus our souls may be made earnest in His cause.

The blessing will come, in the third place, to *the prayer of a dependent church*. See how it is put—“I will yet for this be inquired of by the house of Israel, to do it for them.” That is to say, they will not dream of being able to do it for themselves, but will apply to God for it. Christian men should never speak of getting up a revival. Where are you going to get it up from? I do not know any place from which you can get it up except a place which it is better to have no connection with. We must bring a revival *down* if it is to be worth having! We must inquire of the Lord to do it for us. Too often the temptation is to inquire for an eminent revivalist, or ask whether a great preacher could not be induced to come. Now, I do not object to inviting soul-winning preachers, or to any other plans of usefulness. But our main business is to inquire of the Lord, for, after all, He, alone, can give the increase! Suppose we collect a crowd of people, what of that? It is a fine thing to put in the papers, but what is the good of it, if it ends there? Suppose we have large services and fierce excitement—and the whole thing ends in a pack of moonshine—where is the glory to God? On the contrary, His name is dishonored and His church is discouraged from making special attempts. But when the holy work *begins in prayer, continues in prayer and everything is confessedly dependent upon the power of God*, then the blessing is, indeed, worth having! Inquire of the Lord to multiply you and you will be multiplied! We must wait upon God, conscious that we can do nothing of ourselves—and we must look to the Holy Spirit as the only power for the conversion of souls. If we pray in this dependent way we shall obtain an overflowing answer.

Again, the way to obtain the promised blessing is that the prayer must be offered by *an anxious, observant, enterprising church*. The expression used, “I will be inquired of,” implies that the people must think and ask questions, must argue and plead with God. It is well to ask Him why He has not given the blessing and to urge strong reasons why He should now do so. We should quote His promises to Him, tell Him of our great need—and then come back, again, to asking, inquiring and pleading our cause.

Such a pleading church will win a blessing beyond all doubt! It must be a church which remembers the waste places. The text puts it in the promise and it must not be forgotten in the prayer—"The waste cities shall be filled with flocks of men." A church which anxiously remembers the departments of service which are not succeeding; a church which casts a friendly eye over other churches which may be failing, and takes careful notice of those places where the Spirit of God does not seem to be at work—and mentions all those in prayer—is the church to which the promise is made! I pray the Lord to give you, dear brothers and sisters, heartbreak over sinners whose hearts do not break. I pray He will give you painful anxiety for those who are not anxious. In fact, may God make all the members of this church into anxious inquirers. When the saved ones are anxious inquirers, themselves, there will be plenty of anxious inquirers brought from the world! The way to have inquiring sinners is for us to become inquiring saints! When the saints inquire of the Lord, the sinners will ask their way to Zion with their faces turned there! Every prayer meeting ought, as a matter of fact, to be an inquirers' meeting, where true hearts behold the beauty of the Lord and inquire in His temple.

If we are to obtain the blessing in answer to prayer, *that prayer must be offered by a believing church*. Oh that we did believe God's promise! The Lord says, "I will be inquired of, to do it for them." But unbelieving inquiries are only a mockery of God! How few really believe in prayer! I was reading, the other day, that the Chinese converts of the Inland Mission have shown a feature of piety which is not very common. When they learned that God would hear prayer, they wanted to be always praying, because, they said, "If it is so, that the great God hears prayer, let us ask for a great deal." We do not wonder, therefore, that they have received answers so remarkable to their believing prayers that the missionary scarcely cares to narrate them, lest to unbelievers they should seem to be as idle tales! Indeed, his fears are not at all unreasonable, for in other cases the written lives of praying men have been wretchedly mistrusted. Huntingdon's "Bank of Faith" has been called a bank of nonsense, yet I believe him to have been a thoroughly honest recorder of facts and quite incapable of a lie. When they read the story of Sammy Hick and his turning the wind by prayer, most persons are dubious, but why? Bread was needed for a religious meeting, and no flour could be found, for the mill could not go without wind. Hick took his bag of corn to the miller and bade him grind it. "But there is no wind, Sammy," said the miller. "Never mind, there will be if you only put the corn into the hopper." It was put in, the wind ground the wheat and then it ceased. "Ah," people say, "that is a Methodist story." Yes, it is, and there are many others of the same kind! And some of us have had them happen to ourselves. Answers to prayer do not, now, appear to us to be contrary to the laws of nature—it seems to us to be the greatest of all the laws of nature that the Lord must keep His promises and hear His people's prayers! Gravitation and other laws may be suspended, but this cannot be! "Oh," says one, "I cannot believe that." No, and so your prayers are not heard! You must have faith, for if faith is absent, you lack the very backbone and soul of prayer. Oh, for mighty faith! If we once behold a church filled with real active faith, exercised in believing prayer to the living God, the God of Israel, we shall see the churches multiplied with men as with a flock!

III. We are now to seek comfort for you who do not come to Prayer Meetings, or otherwise wrestle in prayer. ON WHAT GROUND CAN ANYBODY BE EXCUSED FROM THE DUTY OF PRAYER? Answer—on no ground whatever! You cannot be excused on the ground of *common humanity* for if it is so that God will save sinners in answer to prayer, and I do not pray, what am I? Souls dying, perishing, sinking to hell while the ordained machinery for salvation is prayer and the preaching of the Word—and if I don't pray, what am I? Surely the milk of human kindness has been drained from my breast and I have ceased to be human! And if so, it is idle to talk of communion with the divine. He who has no pity on a wounded man, and would not seek to relieve the hunger of one expiring of need is a monster! He who has no pity on souls who are sinking into everlasting fire, what is he? Let him answer for himself.

Next, can any excuse be found in *Christianity* for neglect of prayer? I answer, there is none to be found in Christianity anymore than in humanity, for if Christ has saved us, He has given us His Spirit—"If any man has not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His." And who has the Spirit of Christ? Is it he who looked upon Jerusalem, and said, "I believe that the city is given up, predestinated to be destroyed," and then coolly went on his way? No, not he! He believed in predestination, but that truth of God never chilled his heart. He wept over Jerusalem, and said, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her chickens under her wings, and you would not."—

*“Did Christ over sinners weep,
And shall our cheeks be dry?”*

Shall there be no prayer in our hearts when God has appointed prayer to be the channel of blessing to sinners as well as to ourselves? Then how can we say that we are Christians? In God’s name, how can we make a profession of Christianity if our hearts do not ascend in mighty prayer to God for a blessing on the sons of men?

But perhaps an excuse is found in the fact that the Christian does not feel that his prayer is of very much consequence, for his *heart is in a barren state*. Ah, well, this is no excuse, but an aggravation of the sin! My dear brothers and sisters, if you feel you cannot pray, you ought to pray twice as much as anybody else! Whenever your mind falls into a condition in which it is indisposed for prayer, that condition should serve as a danger signal—something is very much amiss! At such a time there should be a double calling upon God that the Spirit of prayer may be vouchsafed.

I do charge you, professing Christians, not to restrain prayer to God for a blessing, for, if you do, you hurt all the rest of the brethren! Get a bit of dead bone into your body and it harms, first, the member in which it is placed and subsequently the whole body. From head to foot the whole system is worse off because of the fragment of dead matter which is present in the body. So if there is a prayerless professor among us, he is an injury to the entire company! Some of you are the baggage of the army and hinder its marches and its fighting! We have a great army here and if you were all able-bodied men and would march on to the fight, we would see great victories! But we have to carry our diseased ones in ambulances and half the time of the pastor and church officers has to be taken up in looking after the inefficient soldiers who are fit only for the hospital “Who do you mean?” asks one. You, my friend—very likely you! Your own conscience shall decide to whom it refers!

Now, surely we ought to be much in prayer, because, after all, we owe a great deal to prayer. Those who were in Christ before me, prayed for me; should I not pray for others? By a mother’s prayers, some of you, when you were girls, were brought to Christ. Will you not pay back the debt to your mother by praying for your own children? By a father’s prayers, young man, you were brought to the Savior’s feet—now pray for those who are younger than yourself—that they may be brought to Jesus, too. The treasury of the church’s prayers has been expended upon us in bringing us to Christ’s feet. Let us now contribute to the common stock, casting in our prayers for the conversion of others! Common gratitude demands that we attend to this.

I am afraid I shall also have to plead that I must suspect your soundness in the faith, brothers and sisters, if you do not join in prayer. I know some, who, if they are anything at all, they are sound in the faith. This is their beginning and their ending. I used to know, years ago, a few people who were sound all over and never cared whether souls were saved or not because they were so sound! That kind of soundness is empty, from which may the Lord deliver us! Correct opinions are a poor apology for heartlessness towards our fellow men. If we are orthodox, we believe that regeneration is the work of the Spirit of God. Then, dear friends, the natural inference is that those of us who are regenerated should pray the Holy Spirit to regenerate others! If it is entirely His work and we cannot depend upon the preacher at all, we must invoke the divine power! If you do not thus call in divine energy, where is your soundness? I am sure that you desire to see souls saved, but if it is the Spirit’s work, and you do not pray the Spirit to do that work, surely you do not believe your own doctrine! By your soundness in the faith, therefore, I would plead with you that you increase your earnestness in prayer.

You may say, “Well, I think I may be excused,” but I must reply you cannot! “*I am very sick*,” says one. Ah, then you can lie in bed and pray! None of us can fully estimate the blessings which have come down on this Tabernacle in answer to the pleas of our friends who are constant invalids. I believe the Lord sets apart a certain section of the church to keep up prayer through the night watches—and when you and I who are healthy are sound asleep, the watchers do not slumber, or keep silent—but either in praise or prayer they make the hours holy with their devout exercises. I consider that I sustain great losses when dear Christian men and women, who have for years sustained me by their prayers are taken home to glory. Who will fill the gaps?

“*I am so poor*,” says one. Well, you are not called upon to pay a shilling every time you pray to God! It does not matter how poor you are—your prayers are just as acceptable! Only remember, if you are so poor, you ought to pray all the more, because you cannot give your offering in the shape of gold. I

should like you to say with the apostle, “Silver and gold have I none, but such as I have, I give you. My Master, I will be much in prayer.” “Ah,” says another, “but *I have no talent.*” That is another reason why you should pray *more* and not why you should be prayerless, because if you cannot contribute to the church’s public service from lack of talent, you should the more zealously contribute to her strength by the private exercise of prayer and intercession—and thus make those strong who are better fit to go to the front.

“Ah,” says one, “but *I am just converted.* I have hardly obtained peace, myself; how can I pray?” If you need an answer to *that* question, read the 51st Psalm. David begins, “Have mercy upon me, O God, according to the multitude of Your tender mercies,” and so on. And he does not continue long before he cries, “Do good in Your good pleasure unto Zion; build the walls of Jerusalem!” He has hardly been washed, himself, from sin, before he begins to pray to be useful—“Then will I teach transgressors Your ways, and sinners shall be converted unto You.” You new converts are the very people to pray with power!

So from my inmost soul, as if I were pleading for my life (and it lies nearer my health and continued life than some may imagine) I beg you to inquire of the Lord! In thus doing I am pleading for this church’s long prosperity! I am pleading for the good of London! I am pleading for the benefit of the whole world! If you love the Lord Jesus, brothers and sisters, do inquire at the hands of the Lord concerning this great promise of an increase in the church! Prove Him, now, and see if He does not pour out a blessing for you, yes, if He does not increase you with men as with a flock, as the Holy flock, as the flock of Jerusalem on her solemn feast days! God grant His blessing for Christ’s sake. Amen.

PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—EZEKIEL 36:1-14; 24-38.

HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK”—145, 985, 968.

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