

ACHSAH'S ASKING, A PATTERN OF PRAYER NO. 2312

A SERMON
INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, JUNE 11, 1893.
DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,
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“And Caleb said, He that smites Kirjathsepher, and takes it, to him will I give Achsah, my daughter, to wife. And Othniel the son of Kenaz, Caleb's younger brother, took it: and he gave him Achsah, his daughter, to wife. And it came to pass, when she came to him, that she moved him to ask of her father a field: and she lighted from off her ass; and Caleb said unto her, What will you? And she said unto him, Give me a blessing: for you have given me a south land; give me also springs of water. And Caleb gave her the upper springs and the lower springs.”
Judges 1:12-15.

IN domestic life we often meet with pictures of life in the house of God. I am sure that we are allowed to find them there, for our Savior said, “If you, then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him?” God is a Father and He likens Himself to us as fathers. And we who are believers are God's children and we are permitted to liken ourselves to our own children; and just as our children would deal with us and we would deal with them; so may we deal with God and expect God to deal with us! This little story of a daughter and her father is recorded twice in the Bible. You will find it in the 15th chapter of the Book of Joshua, as well as in this first chapter of the Book of Judges. It is not inserted twice without good reasons. I am going to use it, tonight, simply in this manner; the way in which this woman went to her father, and the way in which her father treated her. May it teach us how to go to our Father who is in heaven; and what to expect if we go to Him in that fashion.

I would hold up this good woman, Achsah, before you, tonight, as a kind of model or parable. Our parable shall be Achsah, the daughter of Caleb; she shall be the picture of the true successful pleader with our Father in heaven.

I. And the first thing that I ask you to notice is HER CONSIDERATION OF THE MATTER before she went to her father.

She was newly-married and she had an estate to go with her to her husband. She naturally wished that her husband should find in that estate all that was convenient and all that might be profitable. And looking it all over, she saw what was needed. Before you pray, know what you are needing. That man, who blunders down on his knees, with nothing in his mind, will blunder up, again, and get nothing for his pains. When this young woman goes to her father to ask for something, she knows what she is going to ask. She will not open her mouth till first her heart has been filled with knowledge as to what she requires. She saw that the land her father gave her would be of very little use to her husband and herself because it needed water. So she, therefore, goes to her father with a very definite request, “Give me, also, springs of water.”

My dear friends, do you always, before you pray, think of what you are going to ask for? “Oh!” somebody says, “I utter some good words.” Does God need your words? Think what you are going to ask for before you begin to pray and then pray like business men. This woman does not say to her father, “Father, listen to me,” and then utter some pretty little oration about nothing. No, she knows what she is going to ask for and why she is going to ask for it. She sees her need and she prizes the blessing she is about to request. Oh, take note, you who are much in prayer, that you rush not to the holy exercise “as the horse rushes into the battle”; that you venture not out upon the sea of prayer without knowing within a little whereabouts will be your port! I believe that God will make you think of many more things while you are in prayer. The Spirit will help your infirmities and suggest to you other petitions; but before a word escapes your lips, I counsel you to do what Achsah did; *know* what you really need.

This good woman, before she went to her father with her petition, *asked her husband's help*. When she came to her husband, “she moved him to ask of her father a field.” Now, Othniel was a very brave

man, and very brave men are generally very bashful men. It is your cowardly man who is often forward and impertinent, but Othniel was so bashful that he did not like asking his uncle Caleb to give him anything more; it looked like grasping. He had received a wife from him and he had received land from him, and he seemed to say, "No, my good wife, it is all very well for you to put me up to this, but I do not feel like asking for anything more for myself." Still, learn this lesson, good wives; prompt your husbands to pray with you. Brothers, ask your brothers to pray with you. Sisters, be not satisfied to approach the throne of grace, alone, but ask your sister to pray with you. It is often a great help in prayer for two of you to agree touching the thing that concerns Christ's kingdom. A cordon of praying souls around the throne of grace will be sure to prevail. God help us to be anxious in prayer to get the help of others!

A friend, some time ago, said to me, "My dear pastor, whenever I cannot pray for myself, and there are times when I feel shut up about myself, I always take to praying for you." God bless him, at any rate! "And I have not long been praying for you before I begin to feel able to pray for myself." I should like to come in for many of those odd bits of prayer. Whenever any of you get stuck in the mud, pray for me! It will do you good and I shall get a blessing. Remember how it is written of Job, "The Lord turned the captivity of Job when he prayed for his friends." While he prayed for himself, he remained a captive, but when he prayed for those unfriendly friends of his, then the Lord smiled upon him and loosed his captivity. So it is a good thing, in prayer, to imitate this woman, Achsah. Know what you need and then ask others to join with you in prayer. Wife, especially ask your husband. Husband, especially ask your wife. I think there is no sweeter praying on earth than the praying of a husband and a wife together when they plead for their children, when they invoke a blessing upon each other; and upon the work of the Lord.

Next, Achsah bethought herself of this one thing: *that she was going to present her request to her father*. I suppose that she would not have gone to ask of anybody else, but she said to herself, "Come, Achsah, Caleb is your *father*. The gift I am going to ask is not of a stranger who does not know me, but of a father, in whose care I have been ever since I was born." This thought ought to help us in prayer. And it will help us when we remember that we do not go to ask of an enemy, nor to plead with a stranger, but we say, "Our Father, which are in heaven." Do you mean it? Do you really believe that *God* is your Father? Do you feel the spirit of sonship in your heart? If so, this ought to help you to pray with a believing tone. Your Father will give you whatever you need! If there was anything that I needed and I should ask it of him, I expect that my dear father, old and feeble as he is, would give it to me if it were within the range of his possibility. And surely, our great and glorious Father, with whom we have lived ever since we were newborn, has favored us so much that we ought to ask very boldly and with a childlike familiarity, resting assured that our Father will never be vexed with us because we ask these things! Indeed, He knows what things we have need of before we ask Him!

So this good woman, Achsah, feeling that it was her father of whom she was going to ask, and seeing that her husband hesitated to join her in her request, made the best of her way to go and pray alone. "Well, well, Othniel, I would have liked you to have gone with me, but as you will not, I am going alone." So she gets upon the ass, which was a familiar way for ladies to ride in that day, and she rides off to her father. The grand old man sees his daughter coming and, by the very look of her, he knows that she is coming on business. There is a something about her eyes that tells him she is coming with a request. This was not the first time that she had asked something of him. He knew her usual look when she was about to petition him, so he goes to meet her, and she alights from her ass, a token of great and deep respect, just as Rebecca, when she saw Isaac, alighted from the camel. She wished to show how deeply she revered that grand man, of whom it was an honor to be a child. Caleb survived Joshua a little while and still, in his old age, went out to fight the Canaanites and conquered Hebron, which the Lord had given him. Achsah pays reverence to her father, but yet she is very hearty in what she is going to say to him.

Now, dear friends, learn again from this good woman how to pray! *She went humbly, yet eagerly*. If others will not pray with you, go alone; but when you go, go very reverently. It is a shameful thing that there should ever be an irreverent prayer. You are on earth and God is in heaven; multiply not your words as though you were talking to your equal. Do not speak to God as though you could order Him around and have your will with Him, and he were to be a lackey to you. Bow low before the Most High! Acknowledge yourself unworthy to approach Him, speaking in the tone of one who is pleading for that which must be a gift of great charity. So shall you draw near to God aright. But while you are humble, have desire in your eyes and expectation in your countenance. Pray as one who means to have what he asks for. Say not, as one did, "I ask once for what I need and if I do not get it, I never ask again." That is

unchristian! Plead on if you know that what you are asking for is right. Be like the importunate widow; come again, and again, and again! Be like the prophet's servant, "Go again seven times." You will, at last, prevail! This good woman had not to use importunity. The very look of her showed that she needed something and, therefore, her father said, "What will you?"

I think that, at the outset of our meditation, we have learned something that ought to help us in prayer. If you put even this into practice, though no more was said, you might go away blessed thereby. God grant us to *know* our need, to *be anxious* to have the help of our fellow believers, but to remember that, as we go to our Father, even if nobody will go with us, we may go alone, through Jesus Christ our Lord, and plead our case with our Father in heaven!

II. Now, secondly, in this story of Achsah, kindly notice HER ENCOURAGEMENT. Here we have it; "She lighted from off her ass; and Caleb said unto her, What will you?"

"Oh," one says, "I could ask anything if my father said to me, 'What will you?'" This is precisely what your great Father says to you, tonight; "What will you?" With all the magnanimity of His great heart, God manifests Himself to the praying man or pleading woman, and He says, "What will you? What is your petition and what is your request?" What do I gather from that question, "What will you?" Why, this. First, you should know what you need. Could some Christians here, if God were to say to each of them, "What will you?" answer Him? Do you not think that we get into such an indistinct, indiscriminate kind of a way of praying that we do not quite know what we really need? If it is so with you, do not expect to be heard till you know what you need! Get a distinct, definite request realized by your mind as a pressing need; get it right before your mind's eye as a thing that you must have. That is a blessed preparation for prayer! Caleb said to his daughter, "What will you?" and Christ says to you, tonight, "Dear child of Mine, what do you want of Me? Blood-bought daughter, what do you want of Me?" Will you not, some of you, begin to find up a request or two if you have not one ready on the tip of your tongue? I hope that you have many petitions lying in the center of your hearts and that they will not be long in leaping to your lips!

Next, as you ought to know what you need, *you are to ask for it*. God's way of giving is through our asking. I suppose that He does that in order that He may give twice over, for a prayer is, itself, a blessing as well as the answer to prayer! Perhaps it sometimes does us as much good to pray for a blessing as to get the blessing. At any rate, this is God's way, "Ask, and you shall receive." He puts even His own Son, our blessed Savior, under this rule, for He says, even to Him, "Ask of Me, and I shall give You the heaven for Your inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for Your possession." It is a rule, then, without exception, that you are to *know* what you need, and you are to *ask* for it. Will you do this, dear friend, while the Lord says to you, "What will you?"

And when Caleb said, "What will you?" did he not as good as say to Achsah, "*You shall have what you ask for*"? Come, now, tonight is a sweet, fair night for praying! I do not know a night when it is not so, but tonight is a delightful night for prayer. You shall have what you ask for. "All things whatever you shall ask in prayer, believing, you shall receive." Desires written in your heart by the Holy Spirit will, all of them, be fulfilled! Come, then, think of these three things; you must *know* what you need, you must *ask* for what you need and you shall *have* what you need! Your Father says to you, as Caleb said to Achsah, "What will you?"

And, once more, *it shall be a pleasure to your Father to hear you ask*. There stands Caleb, that good, brave, grand man, and he says to his daughter, "What will you?" He likes to see her open that mouth that is so dear to him! He loves to listen to the music of her voice! The father delights to hear his child tell him what she needs and it shall be no displeasure to your God to hear you pray, tonight! It shall be a joy to Him to have your petition spread before Him. Many fathers would quite as soon that their children did *not* tell them all their needs; in fact, the fewer their needs, the better pleased will their parents be! But our Father in heaven feels a pleasure in giving to us *all* we need, for giving does not impoverish Him, and withholding would not enrich Him. He as much delights to give as the sun delights to shine! It is the very element of God to be scattering bounties! Come, then, and pray to Him; you will thus please Him more than you will please yourself! I wish that I could so speak, tonight, that every child of God here would say, "The preacher is talking to me. He means that I have to pray and that God will hear me, and bless me!" Yes, that is *precisely* what I mean! Take my advice and prove it to yourself, tonight, and see if it is not so, that God takes delight in your poor, feeble, broken prayer and grants your humble petition!

Thus we have seen Achsah's consideration before prayer, and her encouragement to pray.

III. Now comes HER PRAYER itself.

As soon as she found that she had an audience with her father of the kindest sort, she said to him, "Give me a blessing." I like that petition; it is a good beginning; "Give me a blessing." I should like to put that prayer into every believing mouth here, tonight, "Give me a blessing. Whatever You do not give me, give me a blessing! Whatever else You give me, do not fail to give me a blessing." A father's blessing is an inheritance to a loving child. "Give me a blessing." What is the blessing of God? If He shall say, "You are blessed," you may defy the devil to make you cursed! If the Lord calls you blessed, you are blessed! Though covered with boils, as Job was, you are blessed. Though near to death, like Lazarus, with the dogs licking his sores, you are blessed! If you should be dying, like Stephen, beneath the stones of murderous enemies, if God blesses you, what more can you wish for? No, Lord, put me anywhere that You will, as long as I get Your blessing. Deny me what You will, only give me Your blessing. I am rich in poverty if You bless me! So Achсах said to her father, "Give me a blessing." I wish that prayer might be prayed by everybody here, tonight. Printers here, tonight, pray for once, if you have not prayed before, "Lord, give me a blessing." Soldiers, pray your gracious God to give you a blessing! Young men and maidens, old men and fathers, take this prayer of Achсах's upon your hearts, tonight, "Give me a blessing." Why, if the Lord shall hear that prayer from everybody in this place, what a blessed company we shall be! And we shall go our way to be a blessing to this City of London beyond what we have ever been before!

Notice next, in Achсах's prayer, how *she mingled gratitude with her petition*; "Give me a blessing: for you have given me a south land." We like, when people ask anything of us, to hear them say, "You did help me, you know, sir, a month ago." But if they seem to come to you and quite forget that you ever helped them, and never thank you, never say a word about it, but come begging again and again, you say to yourself, "Why, I helped that fellow a month ago! He never said a word about that." "Have I not seen you before?" "No, sir I do not know that you ever have." "Ah," you say to yourself, "he will get no more out of me. He is not grateful for what he has had." I believe that ingratitude seals up the springs of blessing. When we do not praise God for what we *have received* from Him, it seems to me that He should say, "I am not going to cast My pearls before swine. I shall not give My precious things to those who set no value upon them." When you are praying, take to praising, also; you will gather strength thereby! When a man has to take a long jump, you have seen him go back a good distance and then run forward to get a spring. Go back in grateful praise to God for what He has done for you in days gone by, and then get a spring for your leap for a future blessing, or a present blessing! Mingle gratitude with all your prayers!

There was not only gratitude in this woman's prayer, but *she used former gifts as a plea for more*; "You have given me a south land; give me also." Oh, yes, that is grand argument with God; "You have given me, therefore, give me some more." You cannot always use this argument with men, for if you remind them that they have given you so much, they say, "Well, now, I think that somebody else must have a turn. Could you not go next door?" It is never so with God. There is no argument with Him like this, "Lord, You have done this to me. You are always the same. Your all-sufficiency is not abated, therefore, do again what You have done!" Make every gift that God gives you a plea for another gift! And when you have that other gift, make it a plea for another gift; He loves you to do this. Every blessing given contains the eggs of other blessings within it. You must take the blessing and find the hidden eggs and let them be hatched by your earnestness; and there shall be a whole brood of blessings springing out of a single blessing!

But this good woman *used this plea in a particular way*; she said, "You have given me a south land; give me also springs of water." This was as much as to say, "Though you have given me the south land and I thank you for it, it is no good to me unless I have water for it. It is a very hot bit of ground, this south land; it needs irrigating. My husband and I cannot get a living from it unless you give us springs of water." Do you see the way you are to pray? "Lord, You have given me so much, and it will all be good for nothing if You do not give me more. If You do not finish, it is a pity that You did ever begin. You have given me very many mercies, but if I do not have many more, all Your generosity will be lost. You do not begin to build unless you mean to finish and so I come to You to say, 'You have given me a south land, but it is dry. Give me, also, springs of water to make it of real value to me.'" In this prayer of Achсах's there is a particularity and a specialty; "Give me also springs of water." She knew what she was praying for, and that is the way to pray! When you ask of God, ask distinctly; "Give me springs of water." You may say, "Give me my daily bread." You may cry, "Give me a sense of pardoned sin." You may distinctly ask for *anything* which God has promised to give, but mind that, like this woman, you are distinct and plain in what you ask of God; "Give me springs of water."

Now, it seems to me, tonight, as if I could pray that prayer, "Give me springs of water." "Lord, you have given me a south land; all this congregation, Sunday after Sunday, all this multitude of people; but, Lord, how can I preach to them if You do not give me springs of water? 'All my fresh springs are in You.' What is the use of the hearers if there is not the power of the Holy Spirit going with the Word to bless them? Give me springs of water." Now, I can suppose a Sunday school teacher here, tonight, saying, "Lord, I thank You for my interesting class and for the attention that the scholars pay to what I say to them. But, Lord, what is the good of my children to me unless You give me springs of water? Oh, that, out of myself, out of my very soul, might flow rivers of living water for my dear scholars and that I might have the power of Your Holy Spirit with all my teaching! Give me springs of water." I can imagine a Christian parent here saying, "Lord, I thank You for my wife and my children. I thank You that You have given me servants over whom I have influence. I thank You for all these, but what is the use of my being the head of a family unless You give me springs of divine grace that, like David, I may bless my household and see my children grow up in Your fear? Give me springs of water." The point of this petition is this, "O Lord, what You have given me is of little good to me unless You give me something more."

O dear hearers, if God has given you money, pray that He will give you grace to use it aright, or else, if you hoard it up or spend it, it may, in either case, prove a curse to you! Pray, "Give me springs of water! Give me grace to use my wealth aright." Some here have many talents. Riches in the brain are among the best of riches. Be thankful to God for your talents, but cry, "Lord, give me of Your grace, that I may use my talents for Your glory. Give me springs of water, or else my talents shall be a dry and thirsty land, yielding no fruit to You. Give me springs of water." You see, the prayer is not merely for water, but for *springs* of water. "Give me a perpetual, eternal, always-flowing fountain. Give me grace that shall never fail, but shall flow, and flow on, and flow forever! Give me a constant supply; "Give me springs of water."

This woman's prayer, then, I have thus tried to commend to you. Oh, that we might all have grace to copy her!

IV. Now, lastly, see HER SUCCESS. Upon this I will not detain you more than a minute or two. "Caleb gave her the upper springs and the lower springs."

Observe, *her father gave her what she asked for*. She asked for springs and he gave her springs. "If a son shall ask bread of any of you that is a father, will he give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will he for a fish give him a serpent?" God gives us what we ask for when it is wise to do so. Sometimes we make mistakes and ask for the wrong thing; and then He is kind enough to put the pen through the petition and write another word into the prayer; and answer the *amended* prayer rather than the first foolish edition of it! Caleb gave Achsah what she asked.

Next, *he gave her in large measure*. She asked for springs of water and he gave her the upper springs *and* the lower springs. The Lord "is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask, or think." Some use that passage in prayer and misquote it, "above what we can ask or even think." That is not in the Bible, because you *can* ask or even *think* anything you like. But it is, "*above* all that we ask, or think." Our asking or our thinking falls short, but God's giving never does!

And *her father gave her this without a word of upbraiding*. He did not say, "Ah, Achsah, you are always begging of me!" He did not say, "Now that I have given you to your husband, it is too bad of him to let you come and ask for more from me, when I have already given you plenty." There are some gruff old fathers who would speak like that to their daughters, and say, "No, no, no! Come, come, I cannot stand this; you already have a good portion, my girl; and I have others to think of as well as you." No, Caleb gave her the upper and the lower springs and never said a word by way of blaming her. But I will be bound to say that he smiled on her, as he said, "Take the upper and the lower springs, and may you and your husband enjoy the whole! You have only asked, after all, what my heart delights to give you." Now, may the Lord grant unto us, tonight, to ask of Him in wisdom, and may He not have to upbraid us, but give us all manner of blessings both of the upper and the lower springs, both of heaven and earth, both of eternity and time, and give them freely, and not say, even, a single word by way of upbraiding us!

I have done with this last point when I have asked a plain question or two. Why is it that, tonight, some of you dear friends have a very parched-up inheritance? The grass will not grow and the corn will not grow. Nothing good seems to grow. You have been plowing and turning the plot up, and sowing, and weeding; and yet nothing comes of it. You are a believer, and you have an inheritance, but you are

not very much given to song, not very cheery, not very happy. And you are sitting here, tonight, and singing, to the tune Job;

*“Lord, what a wretched land is this,
That yields us no supply!”*

Well, why is that? There is no need for it. Your heavenly Father does not want you to be in that miserable condition. There is something to be had that would lift you out of that state and change your tone altogether. May every child of God here go to his Father, just like Achsah went to Caleb! Pour out your heart before the Lord, with all the simple ease and naturalness of a trustful, loving child.

Do you say, “Oh, I could not do that”? Then I shall have to ask you this question, “Are we truly the children of God if we never feel towards Him any of that holy boldness?” Do you not think that every child must feel a measure of that confidence towards his father? If there is a son in the world who says, “No, I-I-I really could not speak to my father,” well, I shall not make any enquiries, but I know that there is something wrong up at his home; there is something not right either with the father or with the boy! Wherever there is a loving home, you never hear the son or daughter say, “You know, I-I-I could not ask my father.” I hope that we have, none of us, got into that condition with regard to our earthly fathers! And let none of us be in that condition with regard to our heavenly Father;

*“My soul, ask what you will,
You cannot be too bold
Since His own blood for you He spilled,
What else can He withhold?”*

Come, then, while in the pew, tonight, before we gather at the communion table, and present your petition with a child-like confidence and expect it to be heard, and expect, tonight, to have fellowship with the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ!

And you, poor sinners, who cannot pray like children, what are you to do? Well, you remember how the Savior said to the Syrophenician woman, “It is not right to take the children’s bread, and to cast it unto the dogs.” But she answered, “Yes, Lord; yet the dogs under the table eat of the children’s crumbs.” You come in for the crumbs, tonight, but if a man is satisfied to eat crumbs with the dogs, God will not be satisfied till He makes him eat bread with the children! If you will take the lowest place, God will give you a higher place before long. Come to Jesus and trust in Him henceforth and forever. Amen.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON. MATTHEW 7.

Verse 1. *Judge not, that you be not judged.*

You are not called to judge; you are not qualified to judge. “God is the Judge: He puts down one, and sets up another.” There is much better work to be done by us than that of setting up as judges of others.

2. *For with what judgment you judge, you shall be judged: and with what measure you mete, it shall be measured to you again.*

Do not judge the whole character of a man by one single action. Do not attempt to judge his motives. You cannot read his heart; you are not omniscient; you are not infallible. You will very soon find other people judging *you* and when, one of these days, you shall be falsely judged and condemned, you will not need to have any surprise if you have done the same thing, yourself; it will be only your corn measured back to you with the bushel you used in measuring other people’s.

3. *And why behold you the mote that is in your brother’s eye, but consider not the beam that is in your own eye?*

There is something in yourself that is worthy of your consideration, something that you ought to consider; it is a big, blinding beam in your own eye! As for the mote that is in your brother’s eye, there is no need that you should even see it. Why do you behold it? Charity is always a little blind to the faults of others, for it remembers so well its own.

4. *Or how will you say to your brother, Let me pull out the mote out of your eye; and, behold, a beam is in your own eye?*

A blind man cannot be a good oculist. He should see well who tries to mend other people’s eyes, but with a beam in one’s own eye, it must be poor work to attempt to take motes out of the eyes of others. This does not prevent our using reproof and rebuke when they are needed. Even under the law, the command was given, “You shall not hate your brother in your heart: you shall in any wise rebuke your neighbor, and not suffer sin upon him,” as if it were a kind of hatred to avoid the duty of kindly and gen-

tle rebuke. That is a very different thing from exposing the faults of others and aggravating and exaggerating the faults of others, as, alas, so many do! Oh, how much misery might be saved in the world if the scandal market were not so brisk! Perhaps tongues would not move so fast if eyes were used to a better purpose.

5, 6. *You hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of your own eye; and then shall you see clearly to cast out the mote out of your brother's eye. Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast you your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and tear you.*

There are some holy enjoyments, some gracious experiences, and some deep doctrines of the Word of God, which it would be out of place to speak of before certain profane and unclean persons. They would only make a jest of them; perhaps they might persecute you on account of them. No, holy things are for holy men and, as of old, the crier in the Grecian temple was known to say, before the mysteries were performed, "Far hence, you profane!" so sometimes, before we enter into the innermost circle of Christian converse, it would be well for us to notice who is listening.

7, 8. *Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: for everyone that asks receives.*

This is invariably the rule of God's kingdom, whenever the request is a right one, and is presented in a right manner.

8-11. *And he that seeks, finds; and to him that knocks it shall be opened. Or what man is there of you, whom if his son asks for bread, will he give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven, give good things to them that ask Him?*

The point is, not only that God gives, but that He knows how to give. If He were always to give according to our prayers, it might be very injurious to us; He might give us that with which we could do hurt, as when a father should put a stone into a boy's hand. Or He might give us that which might do us hurt, as if a father were to give his child a serpent. He will do neither of these things, but He will answer us in discretion and, with prudence will He fulfill our desires. You know how to give to your children; how much more shall your infinitely wise Father, who from heaven sees all the surroundings of men, give good things to them that ask Him?

12. *Therefore all things whatever you would that men should do to you, do you even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets.*

"The law and the prophets" are here condensed into a single sentence. This is the golden rule, a handy rule, a perpetually applicable rule, useful in every condition; and it never makes a mistake.

13, 14. *Enter you in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and many there are which go in there: because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way which leads unto life, and few there are that find it.*

It is a way of self-denial, it is a way of humility, and it is a way which is distasteful to the natural pride of men! It is a precise way, it is a holy way, a strait way and, therefore, men do not care for it. They are too big, too proud to go along a narrow lane to heaven; yet this is the right way. There are many broad ways, as Bunyan says, that abut upon it, but you may know them by their being broad, and you may know them by their being crowded! The Christian has to swim against the current; he has to do more than that, he has to go against himself; so strait is the road! But if you wish to go down to hell, you have only to float with the stream and you can have any quantity of company that you like.

15. *Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing.*

Dressed like Elijah.

15. *But inwardly they are ravening wolves.*

Very Ahabs and Jezebels! And they will deceive you, if you are not divinely guarded against them.

16. *You shall know them;*

How? By their eloquence? No. Some of the worst of teachers have had great persuasiveness. You shall know them by their earnestness? No. Some have compassed sea and land to make proselytes to a lie. You shall know them how, then?

16. *By their fruits.*

If their teaching makes you better, if it makes you love God, if it draws you to holiness, if it inspires you with noble and heroic sentiments so that you imitate Christ; then listen to them.

16-20. *Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree brings forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree brings forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a*

corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that brings not forth good fruit is hewn down and cast into the fire. Therefore by their fruits you shall know them.

After all, this is the best test of any doctrine, the practice to which it leads. I remember discussing, one day, with a person about the doctrine of future punishment. We were arguing and the gentleman who owned the vessel on which we were, said, "Come up on deck and enjoy the fresh air, and leave that subject. But," he said, "you, sir, will kindly go as far as possible from my men, for they are bad enough as they are, and if you tell them there is no punishment for sin, they will be worse than ever. As for you, Mr. Spurgeon, you may go where you like; you won't do them any harm." I thought that rough and ready mode of argument was about as good a commendation as I could wish to have!

21. *Not everyone that says unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that does the will of My Father which is in heaven.*

Not talking, but doing! Not loud profession, but quiet, practical godliness wins the day!

22, 23. *Many will say to Me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name? And in Your name have cast out devils? And in Your name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from Me, you that work iniquity.*

If Christ does not know us, it matters not what we do! Even if we work miracles, if we astound the world with our abilities; it is all *nothing* if Christ does not know us! Now, I think there are many here who can humbly but confidently say, "He knows me." He knows some of us, if by nothing else, by our constantly begging of Him. We have been at Him day and night in our necessities, pleading for His bounty, His mercy, and His company, and He cannot say He does not know us. He knows a great deal about us through our prayers, if by no other way.

24. *Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock.*

What a mercy there is a rock to build on! We could not have made one, but there is the rock.

25. *And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew.*

For the best man will have his troubles.

25. *And beat upon that house.*

For the best man will feel the troubles; they will come home to him.

25-27. *And it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock. And everyone that hears these sayings of Mine, and does them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man which built his house upon the sand: and the rain descended.*

For the worst of men will have their troubles. There is no escaping the trials of life by sin.

27. *And the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it.*

There was no building it again; it was altogether gone, swept right away; no vestige of it remained.

28, 29. *And it came to pass, when Jesus had ended these sayings, the people were astonished at His doctrine: for He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.*

He touched their conscience. His teaching came home to them. They could not help feeling that it was true. Besides, He did not keep on quoting Rabbi This, and Rabbi That, but He spoke from His own knowledge; "He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes."

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