

PRAYER MEETINGS

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A SERMON
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 DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,
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“These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication.”
Acts 1:14.

IN all those churches which are not altogether tied and bound by liturgies and rituals, it has been common to hold meetings for social prayer. We call them prayer meetings. Now, it may be profitable, now and then, to look over some of our institutions, to see whether they are Scriptural—to notice their defects, to see in what respect they may be improved, or to observe their merits—that we may be induced still further to carry them on. The subject, therefore, this evening, suggested to me by the fact that we are going to meet for a day of prayer tomorrow, is that of prayer-meetings—assemblies of the people of God for worship of that peculiar kind which consists in each one expressing his desire before the Lord. Let us, then, go through very briefly—

I. THE APOSTOLIC HISTORY OF MEETINGS FOR PRAYER.

These meetings must have been very common, indeed. They were, doubtless, everyday things, but still there are some few records of the facts connected with them which may be instructive. The first meeting for prayer which we find after our Lord’s ascension to heaven is the one mentioned in the text—and we are led from it to remark that *united prayer is the comfort of a disconsolate Church*. Can you judge of the sorrow which filled the hearts of the disciples when their Lord was gone from them? They were an army without a leader, a flock without a shepherd, a family without a head. Exposed to innumerable trials, the strong, brazen wall of His presence, which had been round about them, was now withdrawn. In the deep desolation of their spirits they resorted to prayer. They were like a flock of sheep that will huddle together in a storm, or come closer, each to its fellow, when they hear the sound of the wolf. Poor defenseless creatures as they were, they yet loved to come together and would die together if necessary. They felt that nothing made them so happy, nothing so emboldened them, nothing so strengthened them to bear their daily difficulties as to draw near to God in common supplication! Beloved, let every church learn the value of its prayer meetings in its dark hours! When the pastor is dead, and when it has been difficult to find a suitable successor. When, it may be, there are problems and divisions. When death falls upon honored members, when poverty comes in, when there is a spiritual dearth, when the Holy Spirit appears to have withdrawn Himself—there is but one remedy for these and a thousand other evils—and that one remedy is contained in this short sentence, “Let us pray.” Those churches which are now writing, “Ichabod,” on their walls and who sorrowfully confess that the congregation is slowly dwindling, might soon restore their numbers if they did but know how to pray! Brothers and sisters, though they are dispirited, now, defeat would then soon become success, their spirits being revived by drawing near to God! And if any of you are personally afflicted and troubled in your estate, you shall find that after coming up to the house of God, your own private prayer chamber will be peculiarly comforting to you! And after that, come and unite with the saints of God who have, probably, all of them, experienced assaults like yours. And as you hear them pouring out sighs similar to yours and making requests such as you would make, but scarcely know how to word them, you will see the footprints of the flock and, by-and-by, you shall see the Shepherd, Himself! One of the first uses of the prayer meeting, then, is to encourage a discouraged people.

Again, if you look at the second chapter of the Acts of the Apostles, you will perceive that *the prayer meeting is the place for the reception of divine power*. “They were all with one accord in one place,” making their prayers and, as they waited there, suddenly they heard the sound as of a rushing,

mighty wind, and the cloven tongues descended upon them and they were clothed with the power which Jesus had promised them. And what a difference it made in them! Common fishermen became the extraordinary messengers of heaven! Illiterate men spoke with tongues that they had never, themselves, heard! They began to reveal mysteries which had not been revealed to philosophers or kings! These men were lifted out of the level of ordinary humanity and became God-inspired, filled with the Deity, Himself, who came to dwell in their hearts and minds! The result was that poor wavering Peter became bold as a lion and the impetuous John, who would have called fire from heaven upon the Samaritans, had another fire fall upon him—one not to destroy, but to rescue and bless!

Now, the great need of the Church in all times is the power of the Holy Spirit. “I believe in the Holy Spirit,” says the creed, but how many, or rather how few are there who really do believe in Him? There is a mysterious, supernatural energy which comes from the third person of the blessed Trinity which really, at this day, falls upon men—as really as when Peter spoke with unknown tongues or worked miracles. And though the power of working miracles is not given now, yet spiritual power is given and this spiritual power is as manifest, and just as certainly with us, today, if we possess the Spirit, as it was with the apostles! Now, if we want to get this, the most likely place in which to find it is the prayer meeting. I will guarantee you that the best teachers of the school, the men who are of the right spirit, are those who will be found here tomorrow evening. I will guarantee you that the best ministers are those who do not despise the gathering of the people of God! And I am sure that the cream of the Christian Church will be found on the whole—of course, other things are to be considered, too—among those who most commonly assemble for prayer. Oh, yes, this is the place to meet with the Holy Spirit and this is the way to get His mighty power! If we would have Him, we must meet in greater numbers! We must pray with greater fervency, we must watch with greater earnestness and believe with firmer steadfastness! The prayer meeting, then, has this second use—that it is the appointed place for the reception of power!

The next incident in this apostolic history you will find in the fourth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles, and there you will see that *the prayer meeting is the resource of a persecuted Church*. Turn to the 31st verse. Peter and John had been shut up in prison. The Scribes and Pharisees had persecuted the disciples of Christ. They resorted to prayer and we read that “when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the Word of God with boldness. And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul.” Yes, all the persecutions of the separate members should be recorded in prayer before God, and if the whole Church, itself, should fall into disrepute through misrepresentation, or through the natural hostility of all men to the Church of God, then should it resort to its great friend for its defense!

Persecuting times are hence often very good for the Church because they compel her to pray. When the devil, like the wild boar out of the woods would break up the vineyard, the vines seem to flourish the more because they are watered with the dews of heaven in answer to prayer. Let the stakes smoke at Smithfield and the saints of God go up to heaven in chariots of fire—and then the Word of God multiplies exceedingly and the death of the martyrs brings down the blessing to themselves and the nation in which they dwell!

Anything that would make us pray would be a blessing—and if ever we should come to times of persecution again, we must fly to the shadow of the eternal and, keeping close together in simple, intense prayer—we shall find a shelter from the blast.

Still keeping to the Acts of the Apostles, in the 12th chapter you find *the prayer meeting made a means of individual deliverance*. You know the story well. Peter was in prison and Herod promised himself the great pleasure of putting him to death. He was sleeping one night, chained between two soldiers—and the keepers of the door kept the prison. But prayer was made without ceasing of the Church unto God for him. The walls of the prison were very thick, but prayer was made without ceasing. The soldiers were very watchful—there were 16 of them, appointed to watch Peter by turns—four at a time—and he was chained by both hands to two of them. Yet prayer was made without ceasing of the Church for him—and prayer laughs altogether at stone walls, handcuffs, iron bars and gates of brass! And so, in the middle of the night an angel smote Peter upon the side and raised him up—and his chains

fell off! He put his garments about him—every door opened as he advanced—and Peter found himself in the street, and wondered whether he was awake, or whether it was a vision. And when he got to the house where they were at prayer, they were all equally surprised and thought it must be Peter's spirit—that it could never be Peter, himself! Yet there he was, in very flesh and blood, released from his prison in answer to their prayers! And so in the prayer meeting, the Church of God may plead for individuals. It may not be God's will, there may be no necessity for it, that every one of God's people should be brought out of prison, or raised up from sickness, or saved from need—but if it is the Master's will and is a right thing, He will grant it! And, so, when we come together we may unite in particular and personal supplications! I do not doubt that many a life has been spared in answer to united prayer, that many a soul that has been, as it were, spirit-burdened, has obtained gracious liberty through the prayers of the brothers and sisters. It would be well if we often put up our prayers for one another, remembering those who are in bonds as being bound with them. Observe here, then, another valuable use of the Christian prayer meeting!

Further on, in the next chapter, we find a prayer meeting *suggesting missionary operations*. While the servants of God were met together—see the second verse of the 13th chapter—fasting and in prayer, the Holy Spirit said, “Separate me Barnabas and Saul, for the work whereunto I have called them,” and when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away.

We sit down and we begin to figure away the expense of such-and-such a form of Christian service—and we think that would be a good plan. And the other, and a third, and a fourth, and a fifth—all pieces of human machinery. But I think if we were more often on our knees about God's work, we should more often do right—and the right methods and the right men, and the right plans would come to us! Christ is the head of the Church—and who thinks so much about the Church as the head of the Church? And while we wait upon Him, I do not doubt but what fresh plans and fresh schemes will be marked out, and that different kinds of men will be called to the work as distinctly as if angels had touched their lips with a live coal from off the burning altar, and who may be “separated” to teach the Word, where, perhaps, it has never reached before! England needs many who shall shake her and waken her out of her sleep. She needs a new race of Whitefields and of Wesleys—of men who are before their age only because they are more suited to its culture! She needs some Boanerges who shall thunder out the Word of God, some men who shall be like lightning in carrying out their holy mission! She needs men who will preach the truth of God and tell it to her poor men, yes, and to her rich men, too! And if ever we are to get these, it must be in answer to prayer! Oh, that we would but pray for such men and, having got them, pray that God would make them full of Himself, for they cannot run over with blessings to others until they are, themselves, full of blessing! We would understand what the prayer meeting is, if we did this. I look forward to tomorrow for a blessing of this kind. There may be sitting here, now, some young man to whom China may be under obligation, or of whom India shall be glad. I do not know who it may be, but there may be one here who shall yet bring up diamonds from the very depths, and who shall be inspired to do so in answer to our prayers!

Once more, I will remind you of a prayer meeting which, perhaps, you have forgotten, but which is recorded in the 16th chapter of the Acts. What was *the first Christian service that was held in Europe*? Do you know? Why, it was a prayer meeting! The very first service was not an Episcopal ordination, nor even the preaching of a sermon, for Paul went to the place where prayer was known to be made by the riverside—and there he met with Lydia and preached to her—and her heart was so opened that she received the truth of God! So, then, a prayer meeting became in Europe the first foothold of the gospel! Europeans, you ought never to forget, disown, or think lightly of prayer meetings. How you ought to value them! Very often, I do not doubt, in a Christian enterprise, the first foothold that a cause gets is the prayer meeting. You, brothers and sisters, some of you live in some of the dark parts of this city, and you would like to see a cause for Christ there. Well, begin with a prayer meeting just as Paul did! Or you live in a small village, perhaps, where there is no church with whom you can worship. Well then, hold a prayer meeting! This costs you nothing! This will enrich you! This will serve for a beginning, and although you may not be content with that as the only service on the Sabbath after some little time, yet begin with it! This then, is the missionary's lever—he begins with the prayer meeting.

Thus have I, as briefly as I could, gone through the early history of prayer meetings and shown you the extreme value of such to the Church of God. And now, secondly, and very briefly, indeed—

II. WHAT ARE THE USES OF THE PRAYER MEETING?

The prayer meeting is useful to us in itself, and also very useful from the answer which its gets, and brings to us from God.

It is a very useful thing for Christians to pray with each other, even apart from the answer. God has made our piety to be a thing which shall be personal, but yet He looks for family piety. Happy is the household where the altar burns day and night with the sweet perfume of family worship! He also gives us more extended views and makes us feel that all the saints are our brothers and sisters and that, therefore, our meetings as Christian families, and as Christian Churches in the prayer meeting, become the exponents and natural outgrowth of social godliness. We sing together and pray together—and thus our Christian brotherhood is manifested to the world—and is the more enjoyed by ourselves.

The prayer meeting serves this purpose and sometimes *it also generates devotion.* Some of the brothers and sisters may be very dull and heavy, but others who are at that time in a lively state of mind may stimulate and excite them. I must confess very often to deriving much fire from some of our brothers and sisters who pray here on Monday evenings, when God gives them grace to really pray. When you have been busy all day, and are not able to shake off the cares of business, you get warmed up by getting near to each other in your prayers. And, more than that, the united fires being placed together on the hearth, the coals are made to burn with greater power. There is a kind of divine excitement that comes upon us, sometimes, at the prayer meeting. I recollect in one of our meetings for fasting and prayer, the intense excitement there was, not fleshly, but deeply spiritual. How we felt ourselves bowed down at one time, and then lifted up again at another! I have sometimes sat side by side with a brother who has said, “Can you bear this much longer? I feel it is too much for my physical frame.” Oh, the calm delight which springs from close communion with the invisible God! Such days as I have sometimes had have laid me prostrate all the next day from very joy, from very excess of delight! Oh, this is good for us! This is good for you! Even though the outward man decays, yet shall not the inward man, but be renewed from day to day! Oh, it is a grand thing thus to be made fit again, with joints all oiled, and muscles all braced, and nerves all strung for the battle of life! United prayer, then, serves this purpose, and therefore is it valuable.

But, again, united prayer is useful *inasmuch as God has promised extraordinary and peculiar blessings in connection with it*, “Wherever two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them.” “If two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of My Father who is in heaven.” God asks agreement and once the saints agree, He pledges Himself that the prayer of His agreeing ones shall be answered! Why, see what accumulated force there is in prayer, when one after another pours out his vehement desires—when many seem to be tugging at the rope, when many seem to be knocking at mercy’s gate—when the mighty cries of many burning hearts come up to heaven! When, my beloved, you go and shake the very gates thereof with the powerful battering-ram of a holy vehemence and a sacred importunity, then is it that the kingdom of heaven suffers violence! When first one, and then another, and yet another, throws his whole soul into the prayer, the kingdom of heaven is conquered and the victory becomes great, indeed!

As I was sitting a little while and thinking over this text, I thought of the accumulated love of God which there is in a prayer meeting because God loves every one of His children. Very well, then, there is so much love for one, and here is another, and there is so much love for him, and then, if God’s love to one of His people is a reason for answering his requests—if here are 10 present, there is 10 times the reason—and if there are a thousand such, then surely there must be a thousand-fold force of love to move our heavenly Father to grant the accumulated desires of the assembly!

The prayer meeting is an institution which ought to be very precious to us and to be cherished very much by us as a church, for to it we owe everything. When our comparatively little chapel was all but empty, was it not a well-known fact that the prayer meeting was always full? And when the church increased, and the place was scarcely large enough, it was the prayer meeting that did it all! When we went to Exeter Hall, we were a praying people, indeed. And when we entered on the larger speculation,

as it seemed, of the Surrey Music Hall, what cries and tears went up to heaven for our success! And so it has been ever since. It is in the spirit of prayer that our strength lies! And if we lose this, the locks will be shorn from Samson and the Church of God will become weak as water. And though, we, as Samson did, go and try to shake ourselves as at other times, we shall hear the cry, "The Philistines are upon you," and our eyes will be put out, and our glory will depart unless we continue mighty and earnest in prayer. But now, once again, let us ask—

III. WHAT ARE THE HINDRANCES TO THE PRAYER MEETING?

Now listen, for perhaps some of you will hear something about yourselves. What are the hindrances to the prayer meeting? There are some hindrances before the people come. *Unholiness* hinders prayer. A man cannot walk contrary to God and then expect to have his prayers heard. "If you abide in My commandments, you shall abide in My love." There is a promise made to those keeping the commands. Such shall have power with God! But, on the other hand, inconsistent Christians shall not be answered.

Discord always spoils prayer. When believers do not agree and are picking holes in each other's coats, they do not really love one another—and then their prayers cannot succeed. Discord spoils prayer, and so also does *hypocrisy*, for hypocrites will creep in—you cannot help it—and the more a church flourishes, the more, I believe, do hypocrites get in, just as you see many a noxious creeping thing come and get into a garden after a shower of rain. The very things that make glad the flowers bring out these noxious things—and so hypocrites get in and steal much of the church's sap away and help spoil the prayer meeting. Now, which among you does this belong to? I am not reflecting upon any person in particular, but God knows why some of you do not ever come to the prayer meeting. Some of you, I know, have business that really prevents your coming, and others have service for Him that keeps them away, but surely some of our friends who have no other imperative engagement or duty do constantly keep away from the prayer meeting. I only wish that their conscience were even half-awake, for I am sure it would make them smart for neglecting this duty. I would that they would feel ashamed that they have missed this very great privilege, for had they come with us, they might have drawn near to God and been healed of their pretenses.

But there are some things which hinder the prayer meeting when we are at it. One is *long prayers*. It is dreadful to hear a brother pray us into a good frame, and then, by his long prayer, pray us out of it again! You remember what John Macdonald once said, "When I am in a bad frame I always pray short, because my prayer will not be of any use, and when I am in a good frame I pray short, because if other people are in a good frame, too, I might, if I kept on longer, pray them into a bad frame." Long prayers, then, spoil prayer meetings, for long prayers and true devotion in our public assemblies seem pretty much to be divorced from one another! And prayer meetings are also hindered when those who get up to pray do not pray, but *preach a little sermon*, and tell the Lord all about themselves, though He knows them better than they do, instead of asking at once for what they need. Prayer meetings are often hindered by *a lack of directness* and by beating about the bush. I admired a prayer I heard last Monday night in which a brother said, "Lord, the orphanage needs £3,000—be pleased to send it." That was a straightforward application. Another brother would have said, "Lord, we have great difficulties in our work. Please help us," but this brother just stated the case and I think he believed that God would hear him. Another way to never grow weary in prayer is to do as a good Scotsman said he did. He said, "I never go to God unless I have business to do with Him, unless there is something I want to praise Him for, to confess, or to seek at His hands." We must come not merely with well-rounded and polished periods, but really to pray, and really to praise, and really to confess and seek cleansing! And if we do this, the prayer meeting shall not disappoint us.

Prayer meetings are sometimes hindered by *a want of real earnestness* in those who pray, and in those who pray in silence. Ah, brothers and sisters, one warm, hearty prayer is worth a score of those packed in ice! I fear that much of our prayer is lost because we do not sufficiently throw our hearts into it. It is possible for us to attend the meeting and all the while be thinking of the home, the infant in the cradle, or the shop, the field, the farm, the factory, the counting-house, and I know not what besides! Is it any wonder, then, that prayer stops? The brother who prays may be burning with earnest desire, but his prayer lags because we are not backing it with silent fervor and passionate longing for God's

blessing. Oh, brothers and sisters, we have often spoiled our prayer meetings thus! We have each, I fear, in our turn done something towards it—let us pray that we may never again so transgress.

But the prayer meeting may also be spoiled *after we have been to it*. “How?” you ask. Why, by our asking a blessing and then not expecting to receive it! God has promised that He will do to us according to our faith, but if our faith is nothing, then the answer will also be nothing. *Inconsistency*, too, in not practically carrying out your desires will also spoil the prayer meeting. If you ask God to convert souls, but you will not do anything for those souls; if you ask God to save your children, but you will not talk to them about their salvation; if you ask God to save your neighbors, and you do not distribute tracts among them, nor do anything else for them, are you not altogether a hypocrite? You pray for what you do not put out your hand to get! You pray for fruit, but you will not put out your hand to pluck it, and all this spoils the prayer meeting. Earnest prayer, however, is always to be followed up by persevering efforts—and then the result will be great, indeed! But for a moment will I occupy your time upon the next point, and then we have done. It is this—

IV. WHAT SHOULD BE THE GREAT OBJECTIVE OF THE PRAYER MEETING—AND THAT FOR WHICH WE SHOULD SEEK THE ANSWER?

First, it must be the *glory of God* or else the petition is not sufficiently put up. How much of the Lord’s Prayer consists in prayers for God, rather than for ourselves? “Hallowed be Your name: Your kingdom come: Your will be done, as in heaven, so on earth.” And then comes, “Give us this day our daily bread.” Do we not often begin by asking for the bread, and leave the glory of God to be put into a corner? Pray that King Jesus may have His own! Pray that the royal crown may be set upon that dear head that once was girt with thorns! Pray that the thrones of the heathen may totter from their pedestals, and that Jesus may be acknowledged King of kings and Lord of lords! This is to be the grand objective of our prayer! You recollect how David put it, “Let the whole earth be filled with His glory. The prayers of David, the son of Jesse, are ended.” For the coming of Christ in power, for the extension of His kingdom, for the downfall of error, for the end of the times of darkness, for the ingathering of the Jews and the Gentiles—for all these things let us pray in order that God may be glorified, and on that account alone!

And then, in subservience to that, let us pray *for a blessing on the Church*. We ought to exercise a little of our love for one another in praying for our fellow members. Pray for the minister, for he needs it most. His necessities in that direction are the greatest and, therefore, let him always be remembered. Pray for the Church officers. Pray for the workers in all organizations. Pray for the sufferers. Pray for the strong, for the weak, for the rich, for the poor, for the trembling, for the sick, for the backsliding, for the sinful. Yes, for every part of the one great body of Jesus let our supplications perpetually ascend. Let our prayers be continual, that the holy oil of which we read may run down from the head even to the skirts of the garment!

Then we should also pray for *the conversion of the ungodly*. Oh, this ought to be like a burden on our hearts! This ought to be prayed out of the lowest depths of a soul that is all aglow with sympathy for them. They are dying! They are dying! They are dying without hope! I stood yesterday at the grave’s brink at the funeral of one of our brothers, an elder of the church. The place that knew him once, will know him no more, and someone else now occupies the seat where he formerly sat. It was a great joy to know that he had rested on the rock so long and that he had now entered into the rest which Jesus had promised him. But oh, to stand by those who die without hope is grim work—this is to sorrow without alleviation, to mourn without any sweet reflection to wipe away the tears! Oh, my hearers, will you die in your sins? Will you live in your sins, for if you live in them, you *will* die in them! My hearers, will you die without a Savior? Will you live without a Savior? For if you live without Him, you will assuredly die without Him! It is of no use my preaching to the people, my dear Christian brothers and sisters, unless you pray for them! It is of no use holding special services for the quickening of the spiritually dead unless the Holy Spirit is brought into the field by our prayers! It may be that you who pray have more to do with the blessed results than we who preach! I think I have told you of the old monkish story of the monk who had been very successful in his preaching, but a message came from heaven to him that it would not have been so if it had not been for the prayers of an old deaf brother

monk who sat upon the pulpit stairs and pleaded with God for the conversion of the hearers. It may be so. We may appear to the eyes of men to have the credit of success, but all the while the real honor may belong to someone else! And I do certainly, myself, always ascribe the conversions worked in this house to the prayers of God's people. Let it always be so ascribed and let God have the whole glory of it! But do pray for conversions. Never give up on your unconverted wife, husband! Never cease to pray for your unconverted children. Never let the devil tempt you to be dumb concerning your ungodly neighbors, but day and night, in the house and by the way, lift up your hearts to God in real prayer, and say to Him, "Oh, that Ishmael might live before You!" He has given us His pledge that He will answer—believe it and you shall see it, and you shall have the joy of it while His shall be the glory! Amen.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON:
ACTS 4:8-33.

Peter and John were summoned before the priests to give an account for having healed the lame man, and for having preached in the name of Jesus of Nazareth. In the eighth verse we read—

Verses 8-12. *Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said unto them, You rulers of the people and elders of Israel, if we this day are examined for the good deed done to the impotent man, by what means he is made whole, be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by Him does this man stand here before you whole. This is the stone which was set at naught of you builders, which is become the head of the corner. Neither is there salvation in any other, for there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved.* Nothing can exceed the directness, the comprehensiveness and the boldness of this statement! He not only declares the name of Christ to be the wonder-working name, but he charges them with His murder, reasserts the resurrection—no, further—he cuts at the root of all their ceremonial righteousness and declares that they must be saved by this hated and despised name, or else perish forever! Under all circumstances, let the servant of God behave himself boldly! Let him remember that this is the hour he ought always to speak, and that when the honor of his Master and the welfare of souls are concerned, it is not for him to withhold, but to speak out the truth of God!

13. *Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marveled. And they took notice of them that they had been with Jesus.* Where else could such holy courage have been learned? They spoke, in their measure, just as the great Master did, of whom it is written, "He spoke as one having authority, and not as the scribes." They did not speak with the timid, hesitating manner of a preacher who seems to hold the balance of probabilities between the right and the wrong, the false and the true, but with the demonstration of a hearty conviction of the truth of the principles which they uttered. So Christ spoke, and, having learned of Him, so spoke His disciples!

14. *And beholding the man which was healed standing with them, they could say nothing against it.* Converts shut the mouths of adversaries. The good done by the gospel will always be a dumb-founding argument to the ungodly.

16-20. *But when they had commanded them to go aside out of the council, they conferred among themselves, saying, What shall we do to these men? For that, indeed, a notable miracle has been done by them is manifest to all them that dwell in Jerusalem: and we cannot deny it. But that it spreads no further among the people, let us severely threaten them, that they speak, henceforth, to no man in this name. And they called them and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John answered and said unto them, Whether it is right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge you. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard. Like the vessel full of new wine, which must have vent or burst, so is the man who is filled with the knowledge of Jesus! He must speak. He must—*

"Tell to others round,

What a dear Savior he has found.”

It is no matter of choice with him, for, as Paul says, “Woe is unto me if I preach not the gospel.” As the old prophet has it, “The word of the Lord was as fire in my bones,” and if it is the true Word of God, it will soon burn its way out!

21-22. *So when they had further threatened them, they let them go, finding nothing how they might punish them because of the people: for all men glorified God for that which was done. For the man was above forty years old, on whom this miracle of healing was showed.* Therefore it was the more remarkable—forty years lame and yet healed! But how great is the grace displayed in the salvation of an aged sinner—forty years dead in trespasses and in sins—fifty, sixty, seventy, or even 80 years, a faithful servant of the black tyrant and yet made to follow the new and better Master! What a triumph of grace is that which snatches the sere brand out of the burning when it is so fitted for the fire!

23. *And being let go, they went to their own company, and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said unto them.* You can always tell a man by his company. Had these people been ungodly, they would have done as the ungodly do when they come out of prison—they would have gone off to their old pot-companions. But they are believers, and so they go to their own company.

24-28. *And when they heard that, they lifted up their voice to God with one accord, and said, Lord, You are God, which have made heaven and earth, and the sea, and all that is in them. Who by the mouth of Your servant, David, have said, Why did the heathen rage and the people imagine vain things? The kings of the earth stood up and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord, and against His Christ. For of a truth against Your holy child Jesus, whom You have anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together. For to do whatever Your hand and Your counsel determined before, to be done.* How strangely this doctrine of predestination comes in just there! They are singing of the wickedness of men, and the triumph which God gets over it—and so this is the very sum and substance of the song—that when wicked men think that God’s decrees will be forever put away by the destruction of His Son, they themselves are then actually doing what God had “determined before to be done.” The wildest discord makes harmony in the ear of God! Man may be in rebellion against the Most High, but he is still abjectly the slave of God’s predestination! And let man sin with his free will, even to the most extreme length of folly, yet even then God has a bit in his mouth and a bridle upon his jaws, and knows how to rule and govern him according to His own good pleasure! The ferocity of kings and priests does but fulfill the counsel of God!

29-33. *And now, Lord, behold their threats and grant unto Your servants that with all boldness they may speak Your word, by stretching forth Your hand to heal: and that signs and wonders may be done by the name of the holy Child Jesus. And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together: and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the word of God with boldness. And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that any of the things which he possessed was his own, but they had all things common. And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and great grace was upon them all.*

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