

A SERMON FOR THE WEEK OF PRAYER NO. 354

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*“Continue in prayer and watch in the same with thanksgiving.”
Colossians 4:2.*

THOSE of you who constantly listen to my voice are aware that on the first Sabbath of the year I always receive of a venerable Clergyman—a veteran warrior in the Lord’s hosts—a verse of Scripture which I accept as my New Year’s text and which after being printed becomes the motto of my congregation for the following year. It is somewhat singular that my venerable friend should have sent me in the envelope about a month ago this text. He knew nothing of the proposition for a week of prayer. I do not know that it had been even determined upon at that date—certainly neither to his knowledge nor to mine—and I could not but help thinking when I opened my envelope and saw what was to be my text, that he had been directly and specially guided of God, that my text might be in keeping with the engagements of the week. “Continue in prayer and watch in the same with thanksgiving.”

How greatly do I rejoice that the Churches are aroused to prayer. My honored and venerable Brother will this morning stand up in his village Church, lift up holy hands and bid his people join in the common supplication and I feel but too happy as his younger Brother in Christ—as but a babe compared to so experienced a pastor—to follow his example in stirring you up that you, too, as a great host may join with the general company of the faithful and besiege the Throne of Grace till you carry the gates of Heaven by storm and obtain the mercy which both you and the world so much require.

Without further preface, let me observe that there are three exhortations in the text connected with prayer. The first is *continue*. The second is *watch*. And the third is *give thanks*. “Continuance” sits like Moses on the top of the hill, while Watching and Thanksgiving, like Aaron and Hur, hold up its hands.

I. And first, in regard to prayer, the Apostle says “CONTINUE.” Be you not, O you intercessors with God for men—be you not as those whose goodness is as the morning cloud and as the early dew. Do not begin to pray and then suddenly cease your supplications. That will prove an ignorance as to the value of the mercy which you seek and a want of earnestness as to your obtaining it. How many there are who, under a powerful sermon or during a trying Providence, have bent their knees suddenly in hasty prayer! They have risen from their knees and they have forgotten what manner of men they were.

Take away the whip from them and they have ceased to run. Remove from them the tempest and they have ceased to fly before it. They have ceased to pray when God has ceased to smite. O Church of God, imitate not these heathen men and publicans. Wake not yourself up to a sudden fit of prayer and then return again to your sloth. Stir not yourself a moment from your bed to throw your heavy head back again upon your pillow but continue in supplication—cease not to pray. There is a great distinction between the prayer of the real convert and the merely convicted sinner. The merely convicted sinner, termed by the Law, calls but once. The awakened heart, renewed of the Holy Spirit, never ceases to cry until the mercy comes.

A few days ago, by the seaside, on the coast of the Isle of Wight, a woman thought she heard, in the midst of the howling tempest, the voice of a man. She listened. It was repeated. She strained her ear again and she caught, amid the crack of the blast and the thundering of the winds, another cry for help. She ran at once to the lifeguards who launched their boat and some three poor mariners who were clinging to a mast were saved. Had that cry been but once and not again, either she might have doubted as to whether she had heard it at all, or else she would have drawn the melancholy conclusion that they had been swept into the watery waste and that help would have come too late.

So when a man prays but once, either we may think that he cries not at all, or else that his desires are swallowed up in the wild waste of his sins and he himself is sucked down into the vortex of destruction. If the Church of God shall offer prayer this week and then shall cease to be in earnest, we shall think her never to have meant her prayers. If she shall but

now and then start up and make her supplications we shall write her down a hypocrite intent for a moment upon keening appearances, but afterwards relapsing into her lukewarm Laodicean condition. The exhortation of my text, I think, stands in contrast, then, to the transient prayer which is often offered by ungodly men. *Continue* in prayer. Do not pray once and have done with it, but continue in it.

I think further that the exhortation to continue may be put in opposition to the common dealings of many with God who pray and pause and pray and pause—are earnest and then cool, earnest and colder still. There is a sharp frost—a rapid thaw and then a frost again. Their spiritual state is as variable as our own weather. A shower, sunshine, mist, shower, sunshine again. They are everything by turns and nothing long. There are too many Churches which are just of this character. See them one week, you would believe they would carry all before them and convert the town or village in which they are located.

See them next week and they are “As sound asleep as a church,” which is a common Proverb, a church being too often the sleepest thing in all the world. Sometimes they ran and they did run well— what did hinder them? But they stopped, they paused. They looked about them and after a while they ran again—but they moved not swiftly enough to be able to make up the time lost when they were standing still.

Now I am afraid our Churches have for a considerable period been just in this state—have been sometimes hot and sometimes cold. Look at our revivals everywhere—the American revival, it is a great wave and then dry sand. Look at the Irish revival. I fear that in the end it will come to the same amount. Almost everywhere there have been great stirrings. As if a holy fire had fallen and was about to burn up all the stubble, all men stand in wonder at it, but it ceases and a few ashes remain. The fact is, the Church is not healthy, she has intermittent fits of health. She has starts of energy, she has paroxysms of agony. But she does not agonize for souls—she is not always earnest, she is not always busy. Well did Paul need to say to this age as to his own, “*Continue* in prayer.” Not one week, but every week. Not for a season, but at all seasons. Be you always crying out unto the Lord your God.

In the black country of England, you who have traveled will have observed fires which never in your recollection have been quenched. I believe there are some which have been kept burning for more than fifty years, both night and day, every day in the year. They are never allowed to go out, because, we are informed, the manufacturers would find it amazingly expensive again to get the furnace to its needed red heat. Indeed, the blast furnace, I suppose would all but ruin the proprietor if it were allowed to go out once every week. He would probably never get it up to its right heat until the time came for letting the fire out again.

Now, as with these tremendous furnaces which must burn every day or else they will be useless—they must be kept burning or else it will be hard to get them up to the proper heat—so ought it to be in all the Churches of God. They should be as flaming fires both night and day, caldron after caldron of the coal of earnestness should be put to the furnace. All the fuel of earnestness which can be gathered from the hearts of men should be cast upon the burning pile. The heavens should be always red with the glorious illumination and then—then might you expect to see the Church prospering in her Divine business and hard hearts melted before the fire of the Spirit.

Continue, then, in prayer. Never let your fire go out. But why? Why should the Church always be in prayer? Understand we do not mean by this that men ought to leave their business, forsake their shops and neglect their household, to be always supplicating. There were some fanatics in the early Church who gave up everything that they might be always praying. We know what the Apostle would have said to them for did he not say, “If any man will not work, neither let him eat?” “There are some lazy people who like praying better than working—let them learn that the Lord accepts not this at their hands. Did not the Master, even when He was on earth, after He had preached a sermon in Simon Peter’s boat—did He not as soon as ever He was done, say to Peter, “Launch out into the deep and let down your nets for a draught?” He did this to show that work, hard work, the hardest of work is quite in keeping with the hearing and the preaching of the Word and that no man has any right to forsake his calling to which God has appointed him in His Providence, under pretense of seeking the Lord.

Never stain one duty with the blood of another. It is quite possible that you may continue in your labor and yet continue in prayer. You may not always be in the exercise but you may always be in the spirit of prayer. If there shall not always be iron in the furnace to melt, yet let there always be the fire to melt it. If not always shooting the arrow up to

Heaven, yet always keep the bow well strung, so shall you always be archers, though not always shooting. So shall you always be men of prayer, though not always in the exercise of praying.

1. But why should the Church—to come to the question—why should the Church continue in prayer? For several reasons and the first is, *God will answer her*. It is not possible that God should refuse to hear prayer. It is possible for Him to bid the sun stand still and the moon to stay her monthly march. It is possible for Him to bid the waves freeze in the sea—possible for Him to quench the light of the stars in eternal darkness—but it is not possible for Him to refuse to hear prayer which is based upon His promise and offered in faith. He can reverse nature, but He cannot reverse His own nature and He must do this before He can forbear to hear and answer prayer.

The prayers of God's Church are God's intentions—you will not misunderstand me—what God writes in the book of His decree, which no eye can see, *that* He in process of time writes in the book of Christian hearts where all can see and read. The book of the believer's desire, if those desires are inspired of the Holy Spirit is just an exact copy of the book of the Divine decree. And if the Church is determined today to lift up her heart in prayer for the conversion of men, it is because God determined from before all worlds that men should be converted. Your feeble prayer today, Brothers and Sisters, can fly to Heaven and awake the echoes of the slumbering decrees of God.

Every time you speak to God, your voice resounds beyond the limits of time. The decrees of God speak to your prayer and cry, "All hail! Brother, all hail! you, too, are a decree!" Prayer is a decree escaped out of the prison of obscurity and come to life and liberty among men. Pray, Brothers and Sisters, pray, for when God inspires you, your prayer is as potent as the decrees of God. As His decrees bind the universe with spells and make the suns obedient to Him—as every letter of His decree is as a nail, pinning together the pillars of the universe, so are your prayers. They are the pivots on which earth rests. They are the wheels on which Providence revolves. Your prayers are like God's decrees struggling to be born and to become incarnate like their Lord.

God will, God *must* answer the prayers of His Church. Methinks I can see in vision in the clouds God's register. His file on which He puts the prayers of his Church. One after another they have been deposited, He has cast none of them away and consumed none of them in the fire, but He has put them on His file and smiled as the heap accumulated. And when it shall reach a certain mark which He has set and appointed in His good pleasure and the last number of the prayers shall be completed and the blood of Christ shall have bedewed the whole, then will the Eternal speak and it *shall* be done—He shall command and it *shall* stand fast.

"Let there be light," says He and there shall be light at once. "Let the kingdom come." And the kingdom shall come. He that lets shall be put out of the way, he that hinders shall be cast down and trod as the mire of the streets. Up, Church of God, in all the glory of your prayer, put on your vestments and begin to plead through Jesus Christ your Great High Priest. Enter you within the veil today, for God hears you and He will surely answer you.

2. There is a second reason why the Church should continue in prayer, namely, that by her prayers *the world will most certainly be blessed*. The other evening in visiting the sick, I saw at the distance, down a long street the bright light of a fire. In a moment or so the flames seemed to yield, but again it sprang up and lit the heavens. Again it became dim and dimmer still. As we walked along, we said, "They have got the fire under control. The engines have been at work, how soon it is out!"

I compare this to the Church's work upon the world. The world is as it were wrapped in flames of the fire of sin and the Church of God must quench those flames. Whenever we meet together and are more earnest in prayer, angels might well see in the distance the flames dimmed and the fire giving way. Whenever we cease our exertions and become languid in our efforts, the flame gets the upper hand of us and once more spirits from the far-off world can see the fiery mantle surrounding our globe.

Hand up your buckets, Sirs! Every man to the pumps! Now strip to it everyone of you, work while you have life and strength. Now each man to his knee, for it is on our knees that we overcome. Each man to his station and to his work and let us continue to pass from hand to hand the quenching water till every spark shall be put out and there shall be a new Heaven and a new earth wherein dwells righteousness. To stop while but one part of the fabric is on fire would be to condemn the whole. To pause until the last spark shall be extinct, would be to give up the world to the devouring element. Continue, then, in prayer, till the world is wholly saved and Christ is universal King.

3. Thirdly, continue in prayer, because *souls shall be saved as the result of your entreaties*. Can you stand on the beach a moment—you can scarcely see, but yet you may discern by the lights of lanterns sundry brave men launching the lifeboat. It is out—they have taken their seats. Helmsman and rowers, all strong hearts, determined to save their fellows or to perish. They have gotten far away now into the midst of the billows and we have lost sight of them. But in spirit we will take our stand in the midst of the boat. What a sea rolled in just then! If she were not built for such weather, she would surely have been upset.

See that tremendous wave and how the boat leaps like a sea bird over its crest. See now again—it has plunged into a dreary furrow and the wind, like some great plow, turns up the water on either side as though it were clods of mold. Surely the boat will find her grave and be buried in the sheet of foam—but no! She comes out of it and the dripping men draw a long breath. But the mariners are discouraged, they have strained themselves bending to yonder oars and they would turn back, for there is small hope of living in such a sea and it is hardly possible that they will ever reach the wreck.

But the brave captain cries out, “Now, my bold lads, for God’s sake, send her on! A few more pulls of the oar and we shall be alongside. The poor fellows will be able to hold on a minute or two longer. Now pull as for dear life.” See how the boat leaps, see how she springs as though she were a living thing, a messenger of mercy intent to save. Again, he says “Once more, once again and we will do it”—no, she has been dashed aside from the ship for a moment, that sea all but stove her in, but the helmsman turns her round and the captain cries, “Now, my boys, once more!” And every man pulls with lusty sinews and the poor shipwrecked ones are saved.

Yes, it is just so with us now. Long have Christ’s ministers, long have Christ’s Church pulled with the Gospel lifeboat—let us pull again. Every prayer is a fresh stroke of the oar and all of you are oarsmen. Yes, you feeble women confined to your beds, shut up in your chambers—you who can do nothing else but pray—you are all oarsmen in this great boat. Pull yet once more and this week let us drive the boat ahead and it may be it will be the last tremendous struggle that shall be required, for sinners shall be saved and the multitude of the redeemed shall be accomplished. Not we, but *grace* shall do the work, yet is it ours to be workers for God.

4. But continue in prayer once more, because prayer is *a great weapon of attack against the error and wickedness of the world*. I see before me the strong bastions of the castle of Sin. I mark the host of men who have surrounded it. They have brought the battering ram, they have dashed it many times against the gate. It has fallen with tremendous force against it and you would have supposed that the timbers would be split asunder the first time. But they are staunch and strong. He who made them was a cunning architect. He who depends upon them for his protection is one who knew how to make the gate exceeding massive—is one who knew the struggle full well which he would have to endure—Prince of Darkness as he is.

If he knew of his defeat, yet well he knew how to guard against it if it were possible. But I see this ponderous battering ram as it has been hurled with giant force again and again upon the gate and has as often seemed to recoil before the massive bars. Many of the saints of God are ready to say, “Let us withdraw the instrument. Let us take away the besieging armament, we shall never be able to storm this castle, we shall never effect an entrance.” Oh, be not craven, Sirs, be not craven. The last time the battering-ram thundered in its course, I saw the timbers shake. The very gate did reel and the posts did rock to and fro—see now they have moved the earth around their sockets.

Hell is howling from within because it knows how soon its end must come. Now, Christian warriors, use your battering rams once more, for the gates begin to shake and the walls are tottering. They will reel, they will fall before long—one more blow and yet another and another and another and as Israel went up over the walls of Jericho of old, so shall we soon go up over the fallen ruins of the walls of the castle of Sin and Satan. The Church does not know how near her victory is—we do not believe how much God is doing—but let the Holy Spirit for once give us a little more faith and in confidence that we are nearing the victory—we shall continue in prayer. Turn not back when we have all but overcome, continue still, even till the end shall be and the voice shall be heard, “Hallelujah, it is done. The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ.”

II. The second exhortation is WATCH. Watch, *for you will soon be drowsy if you watch not*. Joshua fought the Amalekites and I never read that his hand was weary, though the battle occupied a very long day. Moses was on the mountain in prayer and his hands grew heavy because prayer is such spiritual work and we are so un-spiritual that the

tendency of prayer upon our nature will be to make us drowsy unless we watch. It is ill-praying, when we are drowsy. It is ill for a Church that is not half-awake to be in supplication. All eyes must be opened. The judgment, the imagination, the hope, the memory—all must be in full vigor, or else we can scarcely hope that prayer shall be successful.

I think I see the Church as I fear she is now. There she is upon her knees, with hands clasped. She mutters a few words. Her head droops, for she is weary. Again she pleads and yet again her head is well nigh fallen on her bosom. She is a sleeping Church in prayer. Am I too severe in this picture? I believe it is true. I think there are some members of the Church thoroughly awake, but they are few. There are multitudes of professors who do not feel the value of souls. There are many who will meet in the room of this lower hall and meet in our own chapels also, to pray who are nevertheless not awake, not awake to the world's necessities, not awake to Christ's glory, not awake to the power of the Gospel—nor awake to their own responsibilities, so that they will pray—but pray and sleep. Here, then, we see the value of the exhortation of the Apostle—"Continue in prayer and *watch in the same.*"

But watch for another reason—because *as soon as ever you begin to pray there will be enemies who will commence the attack.* The Church never was earnest yet without sooner or later discovering that the devil was in earnest, too. The devil has had an easy time of it up till the last six or seven years for the Church has been going on her old-fashioned way doing nothing at all. There was very little abuse of ministers—ministers were getting to be very respectable men and very little abuse of any section of Christians—they were all getting to be very easy and loveable sort of people.

But as sure as the Church, or any section of the Church, shall be right-down in earnest, they will be abused. Never think you are good for anything till the world finds fault with you. Never reckon that you have got a success unless many begin to cry you down. I always think that an article against you, if you have sought with an honest conscience to discharge your duty in the sight of God, is one of the highest compliments the press can pay you. Consider it as such. Never expect that the world will be friends with the Church.

Indeed the world will be friendly enough with the Church if the Church will not do her duty. If there were a sentinel set to guard a post against surprise, if you knew him to be a very great friend of those who meant to make the attack, I think you would suspect very soon that he was in collusion with the enemy. No, Sirs, they who fight Christ's battles, must be men who think as well of the world as the world thinks of them—that is to say, who have no love to the world's esteem and the world no love to them. Martin Luther used to say, "The world gives me a very bad character, but there is no love lost between us, I can give to it as bad a character as ever it gives to me." The world says "quack, pretender, fanatic!" Be it so—be it so, O world, you have no power to honor Christ's ministers, except by upbraiding them. There is no power in the wicked to honor Christ's minister, except they are either trembling before him, or else laughing at him. Either way we will gratefully accept the honor and write it down as being a proof of our success.

But watch, O Church of Christ, watch! A struggle awaits you as sure as ever you are earnest in prayer. In riding along the south coast of England you may have noticed the old Martello towers in constant succession very near to each other. They are the result of an old scheme of protecting our coast from our ancient enemies. It was supposed that as soon as ever a French ship was seen in the distance the beacon would be fired at the Martello tower and then, across old England, wherever her sons dwelt, there would flash the fiery signal news that the enemy was at hand and every man would seize the weapon that was next to him to dash the invader from the shore.

Now we need that the Church of Christ should be guarded with Martello towers of sacred watchers who shall day and night look out for the attack of the enemy. For the enemy will come. If he comes not when we are prayerless he will surely come when we are prayerful. He will show the cloven hoof as soon as ever we show the bended knee. If our motto is "Prayer," his watchword will be "Fierce attack." Watch, then, while you continue in prayer.

But yet again—watch while you pray *for propitious events which may help you in the answer to your prayer.* I have known sea captains, when they have got their ships loaded with coal and they have wished to come up to London with their cargo have been unable to get down the Tyne and out to sea. If they could have got to sea, they could make their passage. And I have once or twice known a wary captain, being well upon the watch, manage to sail out of the river just while there was a little change of the wind and when his fellows have awakened in the morning, they have missed him from his berth and he has stolen a march upon them. He watched and they did not and having lost the wind, they have had to lie in port till he has emptied out his cargo and returned.

Now, the Church should watch while she prays to see if she cannot fulfill her own prayers, look out for opportunities of doing good and see if she cannot steal a march upon her enemies. While she has one eye to Heaven for help, she must have the other eye on earth to look out for opportunities of doing good. God does not always send the Spirit to blow with the same force. We cannot make the wind blow, but we can spread the sails. So, if we cannot command the Spirit of God, when the Spirit of God does come, we can observe His coming and avail ourselves of the glorious opportunity. Watch, then, while you pray.

Watch, too, *for fresh arguments in prayer*. Heaven's gate is not to be stormed by one weapon but by many. Spare no arrows, Christian. Watch and see that none of the arms in your armory are rusty. Besiege the Throne of God with a hundred hands and look at the promise with a hundred eyes. You have a great work on hand for you have to move the arm that moves the world. Watch, then, for every means of moving that arm. See to it that you ply every Promise. Use every argument. Wrestle with all your might.

When you are wrestling with an antagonist, you must keep your eye on him. You must look to see what he means to do next, of where you can get the next grip at him. See where you can get a hold, or plant your foot, so that you can throw him down. So wrestle with the Angel of Mercy. Watch while you pray. You cannot wrestle with your eyes shut, nor can you prevail with God unless your own soul is in a watchful state. O Spirit of God, arouse the Church and help her to watch while she prays.

But one other remark—*watch for the answers to your prayers*. When you post a letter to a friend, requesting a favor, you watch for an answer. When you pray to God for a favor you do not expect Him to hear you, some of you. If the Lord were to hear some of your prayers, you would be surprised. I do believe that if God should send to you what you have asked for, you would be quite astonished. Sometimes when I have met with a special answer to prayer and have told it, some have said—“is it not wonderful!” Not at all, it would be wonderful if it were not so. God says—“Ask and you shall receive.” If I should ask and not receive, it would be wonderful. “Seek and you shall find.”

If you seek and do not find, it is not only wonderful, but I think it is contradictory to God's Word. The Church has but to ask and she shall receive. She has but to knock and the door of mercy shall be opened. But we do not believe this. We fritter away God's Promises and clip the edge of them and then we go to God in prayer and we think that prayer is a very holy exercise—but we do not think that God really hears us. Too many professors believe it is their duty to pray but really they are not so enthusiastic as to think that God actually listens and sends them what they ask for.

A man who should say that he knew that God heard his prayers is in some quarters looked upon as an enthusiast. And what is that but a proof that we do not believe this precious Book? For let the most unprejudiced man be a judge. If this Book does not teach that, “Whatsoever we ask in prayer, believing we shall receive,” then it does not teach anything at all. And if it is not true that prayer is a power which prevails with God, then shut this Book. It is not worthy of any confidence, for it does plainly say that which you say it does not mean.

The fact is, my Brothers and Sisters, the answers to our prayers are always on the way while we are asking. Sometimes they come while we are yet speaking. Sometimes they delay because we have not prayed as we should. God keeps the mercy back at times and puts it out at compound interest because He means to pay it to us interest and all—whereas if we had it at once, we should miss the interest, which sometimes doubles and trebles the principal! We are never losers by His delays, but always gainers. We ought never to say, even though Providence should tell so, that God forgets or is unmindful—we never ought to believe that God has been deaf to our cries, or refused to answer our petitions.

A true believer pleading Christ's name and sacrifice and asking in faith, must and shall receive that which he asks of God. Now, during the next week, the Churches will meet together to ask for God's blessing and if that blessing were to come, we should read the *Missionary Herald* and it would begin, “There has been a most surprising awakening throughout all the Churches in such-and-such a country.” That word “surprising,” ought to be struck out. We should say, “God has been as good as His Word. We asked Him to bless the world and He has done it. And if He does not do it, it will be because we have not asked aright, for as sure as ever we had asked aright, God would have heard us.”

I believe this to be as true as a mathematical proposition. If twice two is four, then it is just as true that God hears prayer. I would not look upon it as being a mere notion, a thought, a very fine imagining, or a pretty idea. It is a fact, Sirs. It is a fact. It is a fact which I could prove in my own experience by a hundred instances if this were the time and place to tell them. But I am sure that the people of God universally could prove that God does hear prayer. As certainly

as ever when you write to a friend you get your answer—more surely and certainly still if you are pleading the name of Christ God will hear you.

But oh, open your eyes and look for the blessing! Do watch for it. Be not so simple as to sow the seed and never look for the harvest. Do not be planting and never looking for fruit. Give up your prayers, or else expect them to be successful. When we were little children we had a little plot of ground for a garden and we put our seeds into it. I well recollect how the day after I had put in my seed I went and scraped the soil away to see if it was not growing, as I expected it would have been after a day or so at the very longest and I thought the time amazingly long before the seed would be able to make its appearance above the ground.

“That is childish,” you would say. I know it is, but I wish you were childish, too, with regard to your prayers—that you would—when you have put them in the ground, go and see if they have sprung up. And if not at once—be childish in refusing to wait till the appointed time comes—always go back and see if they have begun to sprout. If you believe in prayer at all, expect God to hear you. If you do not expect, you will not have it. God will not hear you unless you believe He will hear you. But if you believe He will, He will be as good as your faith. He will never allow you to think better of Him than He is. He will come up to the mark of your thoughts and according to your faith so shall it be done unto you.

III. I have a third point, but my time is almost gone, therefore let me dwell on it very briefly. The third point is, GIVE THANKS.

Prayer should be mingled with praise. I have heard that in New England after the Puritans had settled there a long while, they used to have very often a day of humiliation, fasting and prayer, till they had so many days of fasting, humiliation and prayer, at last a good senator proposed that they should change it for once and have a day of thanksgiving. It is of little use to be always fasting. We ought sometimes to give thanks for mercies received.

Now, during this week, there are to be days of prayer. Take care that they are days of praise, too. Why should we go to God as mournful beings, who plead piteously with a hard Master who loves not to give? When you give a penny to a beggar in the street, you like to see him smile at you—do you not? Is he a crossing-sweeper and you have given him a trifle, he looks extremely grateful and happy and you think within yourself, “What a small expense has made that man happy! I think I will buy another pennyworth of joy the next time I pass by.”

So you give him all the more because of his thankfulness to you. Now, go not before God with a rueful face, you people of God, as though He had never heard you before and you were about to try a great experiment on One who was exceedingly deaf and did not like to give you mercies. God is as pleased to give you His blessing as ever you are to receive it. It is as much to *His* honor as it is to *your* comfort. He takes more pleasure in your prayers than you do in His answers. Come therefore, boldly. Come with thankfulness in your heart and upon your lips and join the hymn of praise with the cry of prayer.

Be thankful for what God has done. Look at the past year. I commend it to your consideration when you meet for prayer. Has there been for the last twenty years such a year as the last? If any man had said seven years ago there would be preaching in St. Paul’s Cathedral and Westminster Abbey, we should never have believed him. But it is has been and it is to be again. If any friends had said that nearly all the theatres in London would be filled on the Sabbath-Day, “Oh,” you would have said, “it is ridiculous, it is an absurd notion.” But it is done, Sirs, it is done.

If any had said to you seven years ago there would have been a congregation of many thousands who, without any drawback in numbers, would always assemble every Sabbath-Day to listen to one minister, you would have said, “Ridiculous! There is no precedent for it. It is impossible. It is not at all possible that the Spirit of God can incline a people’s heart so long to listen to *one man*.” It is done, Sirs, by God’s grace it is done. And what are we to do but to give God thanks for it? When we come before Him to ask Him for fresh mercies, let us not be so foolish as to forget the past. “Sing unto Him, sing unto Him, sing Psalms unto Him. Come into His presence with thanksgivings and show yourself glad in Him with Psalms—for the Lord is God and a great King above all gods.” So thank Him for the past and pray to Him for the future. Thank Him, too, for the power to pray. Thank Him for the privilege of taking the Church’s wants before Him.

And do better still—thank Him for the mercy which is to come. Great God, I thank You for Sinim, the land of China, which shall come unto You. I praise You for India, which shall receive You. I praise You for Ethiopia, which shall stretch out her arms unto You. Great God, today we bless You for what You will do. Your promise is, in the estimation

of our faith, as good as the performance itself. We extol and glorify You. For Your right hand, O Lord! Your right hand, O Lord, has dashed in pieces the enemy. You have broken the bow and cut the spear in sunder. You have burned the chariot in the fire. Your right hand, O Lord, has gotten You the victory. Oh come let us sing unto the Lord, for He has triumphed gloriously. Let us laud and extol Him, for He is King forever and ever!

Say unto Zion, “Your God reigns.” Behold, He comes. He comes to judge the world in righteousness and the people with equity. Rejoice before Him, O you hills, clap your hands, O you cedars! Let the sea roar and the fullness thereof. The world and all that dwell therein! Praise Him, you heavens. And you Heaven of heavens. You spirits that stand before His Throne, for He is God and beside Him there is no God. The whole earth praises You, O God and all Your creatures bless You forever and ever!

Thus with the censor of prayer and praise let us be this week like priests of God. And You great High Priest, take our sacrifice and offer it before Your Father’s face.

I close my sermon. O that some here present may lay the subject of prayer to heart this week! Get alone, dear Friends, get alone this week! Pray for your children this week and groan with God over your ungodly sons and daughters! Pray for your neighbors this week! Put God to the test! See if He does not open the windows of Heaven upon you. Be much in prayer and you shall be much blessed.

And O poor Sinner! You who have never prayed before—the year of God’s redeemed is come. This is the acceptable day of the Lord. If you seek Him, He will be found of you. “Seek you the Lord while He may be found. Call you upon Him while He is near.” Cry to Him now! Say—

“O sovereign grace, my heart subdued!”

Trust Jesus with your soul and unworthy though you are, your prayer shall be heard and you shall be able to join with the company of the faithful in praying for others as well as for yourself. God bless you all, for Jesus’ sake! Amen.

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