

XII. THE UNIVERSALITY OF PRAYER

"It takes more of the power of the Spirit to make the farm, the home, the office, the store, the shop holy than it does to make the Church holy. It takes more of the power of the Spirit to make Saturday holy than to make Sunday holy. It takes much more of the power of the Spirit to make money for God than it does to make a talk for God. Much more to live a great life for God than to preach a great sermon."--Edward M. Bounds

Prayer is far-reaching in its influence and world-wide in its effects. It affects all men, affects them everywhere, and affects them in all things. It touches man's interest in time and eternity. It lays hold upon God and moves Him to interfere in the affairs of earth. It moves the angels to minister to men in this life. It restrains and defeats the devil in his schemes to ruin man. Prayer goes everywhere and lays its hand upon everything. There is a universality in prayer. When we talk about prayer and its work we must use universal terms. It is individual in its application and benefits, but it is general and world-wide at the same time in its good influences. It blesses man in every event of life, furnishes him help in every emergency, and gives him comfort in every trouble. There is no experience through which man is called to go but prayer is there as a helper, a comforter and a guide.

When we speak of the universality of prayer, we discover many sides to it. First, it may be remarked that all men ought to pray. Prayer is intended for all men, because all men need God and need what God has and what prayer only can secure. As men are called upon to pray everywhere, by consequence all men must pray for men are everywhere. Universal terms are used when men are commanded to pray, while there is a promise in universal terms to all who call upon God for pardon, for mercy and for help:

"For there is no difference; for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him. For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved."

As there is no difference in the state of sin in which men are found, and all men need the saving grace of God which only can bless them, and as this saving grace is obtained only in answer to prayer, therefore all men are called on to pray because of their very needs.

It is a rule of Scriptural interpretation that whenever a command issues with no limitation, it is universal in binding force. So the words of the Lord in Isaiah are to the point:

"Seek ye the Lord while he may be found; call ye upon him while he is near. Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord, who will have mercy, and to our God who will abundantly pardon."

So that as wickedness is universal, and as pardon is needed by all men, so all men must seek the Lord while he may be found, and must call upon Him while he is near. Prayer belongs to all men because all men are redeemed in Christ. It is a privilege for every man to pray, but it is no less a bounden duty for them to call upon God. No sinner is debarred from the mercy seat. All are welcomed to approach the throne of grace with all their wants and woes, with all their sins and burdens.

"Come all the world, come, sinner thou,
All things in Christ are ready now."

Whenever a poor sinner turns his eyes to God, no matter where he is nor what his guilt and sinfulness, the eye of God is upon him and His ear is opened to his prayers.

But men may pray everywhere, since God is accessible in every clime and under all circumstances. "I will therefore that men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting."

No locality is too distant from God on earth to reach heaven. No place is so remote that God cannot see and hear one who looks toward Him and seeks His face. Oliver Holden puts into a hymn these words:

"Then, my soul, in every strait,
To Thy Father come and wait;
He will answer every prayer;
God is present everywhere."

There is just this modification of the idea that one can pray everywhere. Some places, because of the evil business carried on there, or because of the environments which belong there, growing out of the place itself, the moral character of those who carry on the business, and of those who support it, are localities where prayer would not be in place. We might instance the saloon, the theatre, the opera, the card table, the dance, and other like places of worldly amusement. Prayer is so much out of place at such places that no one would ever presume to pray. Prayer would be an intrusion, so regarded by the owners, the patrons and the supporters of such places. Furthermore those who attend such places are not praying people. They belong almost entirely to the prayerless crowd of worldlings.

While we are to pray everywhere, it unquestionably means that we are not to frequent places where we cannot pray. To pray everywhere is to pray in all legitimate places, and to attend especially those places where prayer is welcome, and is given a gracious hospitality. To pray everywhere is to preserve the spirit of prayer in places of business, in our intercourse with men, and in the privacy of the home amid all of its domestic cares.

The Model Prayer of our Lord, called familiarly "The Lord's Prayer," is the universal prayer, because it is peculiarly adapted to all men everywhere in all circumstances in all times of need. It can be put in the mouths of all people in all nations, and in all times. It is a model of praying which needs no amendment nor alteration for every family, people and nation.

Furthermore, prayer has its universal application in that all men are to be the subjects of prayer. All men everywhere are to be prayed for. Prayer must take in all of Adam's fallen race because all men are fallen in Adam, redeemed in Christ, and are benefited by prayers for them. This is Paul's doctrine in his prayer directory in 1 Tim. 2:1:

"I exhort, therefore, that first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions and giving of thanks be made for all men."

There is strong Scriptural warrant, therefore, for reaching out and embracing all men in our prayers, since not only are we commanded thus to pray for them, but the reason given is that Christ gave Himself a ransom for all men, and all men are provisionally beneficiaries of the atoning death of Jesus Christ.

But lastly, and more at length, prayer has a universal side in that all things which concern us are to be prayed about, while all things which are for our good, physical, social, intellectual, spiritual, and eternal, are subjects of prayer. Before, however, we consider this phase of prayer let us stop and again look at the universal prayer for all men. As a special class to be prayed for, we may mention those who have control in state or who bear rule in the Church. Prayer has mighty potencies. It makes good rulers, and makes them better rulers. It restrains the lawless and the despotic. Rulers are to be prayed for. They are not out of the reach and the control of prayer, because they are not out of the reach and control of God. Wicked Nero was on the throne of Rome when Paul wrote these words to Timothy urging prayer for those in authority.

Christian lips are to breathe prayers for the cruel and infamous rulers in state as well as for the righteous and the benign governors and princes. Prayer is to be as far-reaching as the race, "for all men." Humanity is to burden our hearts as we pray, and all men are to engage our thoughts in approaching a throne of grace. In our praying hours, all men must have a place. The wants and woes of the entire race are to broaden and make tender our sympathies, and inflame our petitions. No little man can pray. No man with narrow views of God, of His plan to save men, and of the universal needs of all men, can pray effectually. It takes a broad-minded man, who understands God and His purposes in the atonement, to pray well. No cynic can pray. Prayer is the divinest philanthropy, as well as giant-great-heartedness. Prayer comes from a big heart, filled with thoughts about all men and with sympathies for all men.

Prayer runs parallel with the will of God, "who will have all men to be saved and to come unto the knowledge of the truth."

Prayer reaches up to heaven, and brings heaven down to earth. Prayer has in its hands a double blessing. It rewards him who prays, and blesses him who is prayed for. It brings peace to warring passions and calms warring elements. Tranquillity is the happy fruit of true praying. There is an inner calm which comes to him who prays and an outer calm as well. Prayer creates "quiet and peaceable lives in all godliness and honesty."

Right praying not only makes life beautiful in peace, but redolent in righteousness and weighty in influence. Honesty, gravity, integrity and weight in character are the natural and essential fruits of prayer.

It is this kind of world-wide, large-hearted, unselfish praying which pleases God well, and which is acceptable in His sight, because it cooperates with His will and runs in gracious streams to all men and to each man. It is this kind of praying which the man Christ Jesus did when on earth, and the same kind which He is now doing at His Father's right hand in heaven, as our Mighty Intercessor. He is the pattern of

prayer. He is between God and man, the one Mediator, who gave Himself a ransom for all men, and for each man.

So it is that true prayer links itself to the will of God, and runs in streams of solicitude, and compassion, and intercession for men. As Jesus Christ died for every one involved in the fall, so prayer girdles every one and gives itself for the benefit of every one. Like our one Mediator between God and man, he who prays stands midway between God and man, with prayers, supplications, "and strong cryings and tears." Prayer holds in its grasp the movements of the race of man, and embraces the destinies of men for all eternity. The king and the beggar are both affected by it. It touches heaven and moves earth. Prayer holds earth to heaven and brings heaven in close contact with earth.

"Your guides and brethren bear
Forever on your mind;
Extend the arms of mighty prayer
In grasping all mankind."