

II. PRAYER--FILLS MAN'S POVERTY WITH GOD'S RICHES

For two hours I struggled on, forsaken of God, and met neither God nor man, all one chilly afternoon. When at last, standing still and looking at Schiehallion clothed in white from top to bottom, this of David shot up into my heart: "Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow!" In a moment I was with God, or rather God was with me. I walked home with my heart in a flame of fire.--Alexander Whyte, D.D.

We have much fine writing and learned talk about the subjective benefits of prayer; how prayer secures its full measure of results, not by affecting God, but by affecting us, by becoming a training school for those who pray. We are taught by such teachers that the province of prayer is not to get, but to train. Prayer thus becomes a mere performance, a drill-sergeant, a school, in which patience, tranquility and dependence are taught. In this school, denial of prayer is the most valuable teacher. How well all this may look, and how reasonable soever it may seem, there is nothing of it in the Bible. The clear and oft-repeated language of the Bible is that prayer is to be answered by God; that God occupies the relation of a father to us, and that as Father He gives to us when we ask the things for which we ask. The best praying, therefore, is the praying that gets an answer.

The possibilities and necessity of prayer are graven in the eternal foundations of the Gospel. The relation that is established between the Father and the Son and the decreed covenant between the two, has prayer as the base of its existence, and the conditions of the advance and success of the Gospel. Prayer is the condition by which all foes are to be overcome and all the inheritance is to be possessed.

These are axiomatic truths, though they may be very homely ones. But these are the times when Bible axioms need to be stressed, pressed, iterated and reiterated. The very air is rife with influences, practices and theories which sap foundations, and the most veritable truths and the most self-evident axioms go down by insidious and invisible attacks.

More than this: the tendency of these times is to an ostentatious parade of doing, which enfeebles the life and dissipates the spirit of praying. There may be kneeling, and there may be standing in prayerful attitude. There may be much bowing of the head, and yet there may be no serious, real praying. Prayer is real work. Praying is vital work. Prayer has in its keeping the very heart of worship. There may be the exhibit, the circumstance, and the pomp of praying, and yet no real praying. There may be much attitude, gesture, and verbiage, but no praying.

Who can approach into God's presence in prayer? Who can come before the great God, Maker of all worlds, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who holds in His hands all good, and who is all powerful and able to do all things? Man's approach to this great God--what lowliness, what truth, what cleanliness of hands, and purity of heart is needed and demanded!

Definition of prayer scarcely belongs to Bible range at any point. Everywhere we are impressed that it is more important and urgent that men pray, than that they be skilled in the homiletic didactics of prayer. That is a thing of the heart, not of the schools. It is more of feeling than of words. Praying is the best school in which to learn to

pray, prayer the best dictionary to define the art and nature of praying.

We repeat and reiterate. Prayer is not a mere habit, riveted by custom and memory, something which must be gone through with, its value depending upon the decency and perfection of the performance. Prayer is not a duty which must be performed, to ease obligation and to quiet conscience. Prayer is not mere privilege, a sacred indulgence to be taken advantage of, at leisure, at pleasure, at will, and no serious loss attending its omission.

Prayer is a solemn service due to God, an adoration, a worship, an approach to God for some request, the presenting of some desire, the expression of some need to Him, who supplies all need, and who satisfies all desires; who, as a Father, finds His greatest pleasure in relieving the wants and granting the desires of His children. Prayer is the child's request, not to the winds nor to the world, but to the Father. Prayer is the outstretched arms of the child for the Father's help. Prayer is the child's cry calling to the Father's ear, the Father's heart, and to the Father's ability, which the Father is to hear, the Father is to feel, and which the Father is to relieve. Prayer is the seeking of God's great and greatest good, which will not come if we do not pray.

Prayer is an ardent and believing cry to God for some specific thing. God's rule is to answer by giving the specific thing asked for. With it may come much of other gifts and graces. Strength, serenity, sweetness, and faith may come as the bearers of the gifts. But even they come because God hears and answers prayer.

We do but follow the plain letter and spirit of the Bible when we affirm that God answers prayer, and answers by giving us the very things we desire, and that the withholding of that which we desire and the giving of something else is not the rule, but rare and exceptional. When His children cry for bread He gives them bread.

Revelation does not deal in philosophical subtleties, nor verbal niceties and hair-splitting distinctions. It unfolds relationships, declares principles, and enforces duties. The heart must define, the experience must realise. Paul came on the stage too late to define prayer. That which had been so well done by patriarchs and prophets needed no return to dictionaries. Christ is Himself the illustration and definition of prayer. He prayed as man had never prayed. He put prayer on a higher basis, with grander results and simpler being than it had ever known. He taught Paul how to pray by the revelation of Himself, which is the first call to prayer, and the first lesson in praying. Prayer, like love, is too ethereal and too heavenly to be held in the gross arms of chilly definitions. It belongs to Heaven, and to the heart, and not to words and ideas only.

Prayer is no petty invention of man, a fancied relief for fancied ills. Prayer is no dreary performance, dead and death-dealing, but is God's enabling act for man, living and life-giving, joy and joy-giving. Prayer is the contact of a living soul with God. In prayer, God stoops to kiss man, to bless man, and to aid man in everything that God can devise or man can need. Prayer fills man's emptiness with God's fullness. It fills man's poverty with God's riches. It puts away man's weakness with God's strength. It banishes man's littleness with God's greatness. Prayer is God's plan to supply man's great and continuous

need with God's great and continuous abundance.

What is this prayer to which men are called? It is not a mere form, a child's play. It is serious, difficult work, the manliest, the mightiest work, the divinest work which man can do. Prayer lifts men out of the earthliness and links them with the heavenly. Men are never nearer Heaven, nearer God, never more God-like, never in deeper sympathy and truer partnership with Jesus Christ, than when praying. Love, philanthropy, holy affiances,--all of them helpful and tender for men--are born and perfected by prayer.

Prayer is not merely a question of duty, but of salvation. Are men saved who are not men of prayer? Is not the gift, the inclination, the habit of prayer, one of the elements or characteristics of salvation? Can it be possible to be in affinity with Jesus Christ and not be prayerful? Is it possible to have the Holy Spirit and not have the spirit of prayer? Can one have the new birth and not be born to prayer? Is not the life of the Spirit and the life of prayer coordinate and consistent? Can brotherly love be in the heart which is unschooled in prayer?

We have two kinds of prayer named in the New Testament--prayer and supplication. Prayer denotes prayer in general. Supplication is a more intense and more special form of prayer. These two, supplication and prayer, ought to be combined. Then we would have devotion in its widest and sweetest form, and supplication with its most earnest and personal sense of need.

In Paul's Prayer Directory, found in Ephes. 6, we are taught to be always in prayer, as we are always in the battle. The Holy Spirit is to be sought by intense supplication, and our supplications are to be charged by His vitalising, illuminating and ennobling energy. Watchfulness is to fit us for this intense praying and intense fighting. Perseverance is an essential element in successful praying, as in every other realm of conflict. The saints universal are to be helped on to victory by the aid of our prayers. Apostolic courage, ability and success are to be gained by the prayers of the soldier saints everywhere.

It is only those of deep and true vision who can administer prayer. These "Living Creatures," in Rev. 4:6, are described as "full of eyes before and behind," "full of eyes within." Eyes are for seeing. Clearness, intensity,[] and perfection of sight are in it. Vigilance and profound insight are in it, the faculty of knowing. It is by prayer that the eyes of our hearts are opened. Clear, profound knowledge of the mysteries of grace is secured by prayer. These "Living Creatures" had eyes "within and without" They were "full of eyes." The highest form of life is intelligent. Ignorance is degrading and low, in the spiritual realm as it is in other realms. Prayer gives us eyes to see God. Prayer is seeing God. The prayer life is knowledge without and within. All vigilance without, all vigilance within. There can be no intelligent prayer without knowledge within. Our inner condition and our inner needs must be felt and known.

It takes prayer to minister. It takes life, the highest form of life, to minister. Prayer is the highest intelligence, the profoundest wisdom, the most vital, the most joyous, the most efficacious, the most powerful of all vocations. It is life, radiant, transporting, eternal life. Away with dry forms, with dead, cold habits of prayer! Away with

sterile routine, with senseless performances and petty playthings in prayer! Let us get at the serious work, the chief business of men, that of prayer. Let us work at it skillfully. Let us seek to be adepts in this great work of praying. Let us be master-workmen, in this high art of praying. Let us be so in the habit of prayer, so devoted to prayer, so filled with its rich spices, so ardent by its holy flame, that all Heaven and earth will be perfumed by its aroma, and nations yet in the womb will be blest by our prayers. Heaven will be fuller and brighter in glorious inhabitants, earth will be better prepared for its bridal day, and hell robbed of many of its victims, because we have lived to pray.

There is not only a sad and ruinous neglect of any attempt to pray, but there is an immense waste in the seeming praying which is done, as official praying, state praying, mere habit praying. Men cleave to the form and semblance of a thing after the heart and reality have gone out of it. This finds illustrations in many who seem to pray. Formal praying has a strong hold and a strong following.

Hannah's statement to Eli and her defense against his charge of hypocrisy was: "I have poured out my soul before the Lord." God's serious promise to the Jews was, "Then shall ye call upon me, and ye shall go and pray unto me, and I will hearken unto you. And ye shall seek me and find me when ye shall search for me with all your heart."

Let all the present day praying be measured by these standards "Pouring out the soul before God," and "Seeking with all the heart," and how much of it will be found to be mere form, waste, worthless. James says of Elijah that he "prayed with prayer."

In Paul's directions to Timothy about prayer, (1 Tim. 1:8) we have a comprehensive verbal description of prayer in its different departments, or varied manifestations. They are all in the plural form, supplications, prayers and intercessions. They declare the many-sidedness, the endless diversity, and the necessity of going beyond the formal simplicity of a single prayer, and press and add prayer upon prayer, supplication to supplication, intercession over and over again, until the combined force of prayers in their most superlative modes, unite their aggregation and pressure with cumulative power to our praying. The unlimited superlative and the unlimited plural are the only measures of prayer. The one term of "prayer" is the common and comprehensive one for the act, the duty, the spirit, and the service we call prayer. It is the condensed statement of worship. The heavenly worship does not have the element of prayer so conspicuous. Prayer is the conspicuous, all-important essence and the all-colouring ingredient of earthly worship, while praise is the pre-eminent, comprehensive, all-colouring, all-inspiring element of the heavenly worship.