

IV. GOD HAS EVERYTHING TO DO WITH PRAYER

Christ is all. We are complete in Him. He is the answer to every need, the perfect Savior. He needs no decoration to heighten His beauty, no prop to increase His stability, no girding to perfect His strength. Who can gild refined gold, whiten the snow, perfume the rose or heighten the colors of the summer sunset? Who will prop the mountains or help the great deep? It is not Christ and philosophy, nor Christ and money, nor civilization, nor diplomacy, nor science, nor organisation. It is Christ alone. He trod the winepress alone. His own arm brought salvation. He is enough. He is the comfort, the strength, the wisdom, the righteousness, the sanctification of all man.--C. L. Chilton.

Prayer is God's business to which men can attend. Prayer is God's necessary business, which men only can do, and that men must do. Men who belong to God are obliged to pray. They are not obliged to grow rich, nor to make money. They are not obliged to have large success in business. These are incidental, occasional, merely nominal, as far as integrity to Heaven and loyalty to God are concerned. Material successes are immaterial to God. Men are neither better nor worse with those things or without them. They are not sources of reputation nor elements of character in the heavenly estimates. But to pray, to really pray, is the source of revenue, the basis of reputation, and the element of character in the estimation of God. Men are obliged to pray as they are obliged to be religious. Prayer is loyalty to God. Non-praying is to reject Christ and to abandon Heaven. A life of prayer is the only life which Heaven counts.

God is vitally concerned that men should pray. Men are bettered by prayer, and the world is bettered by praying. God does His best work for the world through prayer. God's greatest glory and man's highest good are secured by prayer. Prayer forms the godliest men and makes the godliest world.

God's promises lie like giant corpses without life, only for decay and dust unless men appropriate and vivify these promises by earnest and prevailing prayer.

Promise is like the unsown seed, the germ of life in it, but the soil and culture of prayer are necessary to germinate and culture the seed. Prayer is God's life-giving breath. God's purposes move along the pathway made by prayer to their glorious designs. God's purposes are always moving to their high and benignant ends, but the movement is along the way marked by unceasing prayer. The breath of prayer in man is from God.

God has everything to do with prayer, as well as everything to do with the one who prays. To him who prays, and as he prays, the hour is sacred because it is God's hour. The occasion is sacred because it is the occasion of the soul's approach to God, and of dealing with God. No hour is more hallowed because it is the occasion of the soul's mightiest approach to God, and of the fullest revelation from God. Men are Godlike and men are blessed, just as the hour of prayer has the most of God in it. Prayer makes and measures the approach of God. He knows not God who knows not how to pray. He has never seen God whose eye has not been couched for God in the closet. God's vision place is the closet. His dwelling place is in secret. "He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty."

He has never studied God who has not had his intellect broadened, strengthened, clarified and uplifted by prayer. Almighty God commands prayer, God waits on prayer to order His ways, and God delights in prayer. To God, prayer is what the incense was to the Jewish Temple. It impregnates everything, perfumes everything and sweetens everything.

The possibilities of prayer cover the whole purposes of God through Christ. God conditions all gifts in all dispensations to His Son on prayer: "Ask of me," saith God the Father to the Son, as that Son was moving earthward on the stupendous enterprise for a world's salvation, "and I will give thee the heathen for thy inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession." Hinging on prayer were all the means and results and successes of that wonderful and Divine movement for man's salvation. Broad and profound, mysterious and wonderful was the scheme.

The answer to prayer is assured not only by the promises of God, but by God's relation to us as a Father.

"But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou has shut thy door, pray to thy Father, which is in secret; and thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly."

Again, we have these words: "If ye, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father, which is in heaven, give good things to them that ask him?"

God encourages us to pray, not only by the certainty of the answer, but by the munificence of the promise, and the bounty of the Giver. How princely the promise! "All things whatsoever." And when we superadd to that "whatsoever" the promise which covers all things and everything, without qualification, exception or limitation, "anything," this is to expand and make minute and specific the promise. The challenge of God to us is "Call unto me, and I will answer thee, and show thee great arid mighty things which thou knowest not." This includes, like the answer to Solomon's prayer, that which was specifically prayed for, but embraces vastly more of great value and of great necessity.

Almighty God seems to fear we will hesitate to ask largely, apprehensive that we will strain His ability. He declares that He is "able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we can ask or think." He almost paralyses us by giving us a carte blanche, "Ask of me things to come concerning my sons, and concerning the work of my hands, command ye me." How He charges, commands and urges us to pray! He goes beyond promise and says: "Behold my Son! I have given Him to you." "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him freely give us all things?"

God gave us all things in prayer by promise because He had given us all things in His Son. Amazing gift--His Son! Prayer is as illimitable as His own Blessed Son. There is nothing on earth nor in Heaven, for time or eternity, that God's Son did not secure for us. By prayer God gives us the vast and matchless inheritance which is ours by virtue of His Son. God charges us to "come boldly to the throne of grace." God is glorified and Christ is honoured by large asking.

That which is true of the promises of God is equally true of the purposes of God. We might say that God does nothing without prayer. His

most gracious purposes are conditioned on prayer. His marvelous promises in Ezekiel 36 are subject to this qualification and condition: "Thus saith the Lord God: I will yet for this be inquired of by the house of Israel to do it for them."

In the second Psalm the purposes of God to His enthroned Christ are decreed on prayer, as has been previously quoted. That decree which promises to Him the heathen for His inheritance relies on prayer for its fulfillment: "Ask of me." We see how sadly the decree has failed in its operation, not because of the weakness of God's purpose, but by the weakness of man's praying. It takes God's mighty decree and man's mighty praying to bring to pass these glorious results.

In the seventy-second Psalm, we have an insight into the mighty potencies of prayer as the force which God moves on the conquest of Christ: "Prayer shall be made for him continually." In this statement Christ's movements are put into the hands of prayer.

When Christ, with a sad and sympathising heart, looked upon the ripened fields of humanity, and saw the great need of labourers, His purposes were for more labourers, and so He charged them, "Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest that he will send forth labourers into his harvest."

In Ephes. 3, Paul reminds those believers of the eternal purposes of God, and how he was bowing his knees to God in order that that eternal purpose might be accomplished, and also that they "might be filled with all the fullness of God."

We see in Job how God conditioned His purposes for Job's three friends on Job's praying, and God's purposes in regard to Job were brought about by the same means.

In the first part of Rev. 8 the relation and necessity of saintly prayers to God's plans and operations in executing the salvation of men is set forth in rich, expressive symbol, wherein the angels have to do with the prayers of the saints.

Prayer gives efficiency and utility to the promises. The mighty ongoing of God's purposes rests on prayer. The representatives of the Church in Heaven and of all creation before the throne of God "have every one of them golden vials of odours which are the prayers of the saints."

We have said before, and repeat it, that prayer is based not simply upon a promise, but on a relationship. The returning penitent sinner prays on a promise. The Child of God prays on the relation of a child. What the father has belongs to the child for present and prospective uses. The child asks, the father gives. The relationship is one of asking and answering, of giving and receiving. The child is dependent upon the father, must look to the father, must ask of the father, and must receive of the father.

We know how with earthly parents asking and giving belong to this relation, and how in the very act of asking and giving, the relationship of parent and child is cemented, sweetened and enriched. The parent finds his wealth of pleasure and satisfaction in giving to an obedient child, and the child finds his wealth in the father's loving and continuous giving.

Prayer affects God more powerfully than His own purposes. God's will, words and purposes are all subject to review when the mighty potencies of prayer come in. How mighty prayer is with God may be seen as he readily sets aside His own fixed and declared purposes in answer to prayer. The whole plan of salvation had been blocked had Jesus Christ prayed for the twelve legions of angels to carry dismay and ruin to His enemies.

The fasting and prayers of the Ninevites changed Gods purposes to destroy that wicked city. after Jonah had gone there and cried unto the people, "Yet forty days and Ninevah shall be destroyed."

Almighty God is concerned in our praying. He wills it, He commands it, He inspires it. Jesus Christ in Heaven is ever praying. Prayer is His law and His life. The Holy Spirit teaches us how to pray. He prays for us "with groanings which cannot be uttered." All these show the deep concern of God in prayer. It discloses very dearly how vital it is to His work in this world, and how far-reaching are its possibilities. Prayer forms the very center of the heart and will of God concerning men. "Rejoice evermore, pray without ceasing, and in everything give thanks. For this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you." Prayer is the pole star around which rejoicing and thanksgiving revolve. Prayer is the heart sending its full and happy pulsations up to God through the glad currents of joy and thanksgiving.

By prayer God's Name is hallowed. By prayer God's kingdom comes. By prayer is His kingdom established in power and made to move with conquering force swifter than the light. By prayer God's will is done till earth rivals Heaven in harmony and beauty. By prayer daily toil is sanctified and enriched, and pardon is secured, and Satan is defeated. Prayer concerns God, and concerns man in every way.

God has nothing too good to give in answer to prayer. There is no vengeance pronounced by God so dire which does not yield to prayer. There is no justice so flaming that is not quenched by prayer.

Take the record and attitude of Heaven against Saul of Tarsus. That attitude is changed and that record is erased when the astonishing condition is announced, "Behold he prayeth." The recreant Jonah is alive, and on dry ground, with scarce the taste of the sea or the smell of its weeds about him, as he prays. "Out of the belly of hell cried I, and thou heardst my voice."

"The waters compassed me about, even to the soul; the depth closed me round about, the weeds were wrapped about my head.

"I went down to the bottoms of the mountains; the earth with her bars was about me for ever; yet hast thou brought up my life from corruption, O Lord my God.

"When my soul fainted within me I remembered the Lord: and my prayer came in unto thee, into thine holy temple.

"And the Lord spake unto the fish, and it vomited out Jonah upon the dry land."

Prayer has all the force of God in it. Prayer can get anything which God has. Thus prayer has all of its plea and its claim in the name of Jesus Christ, and there is nothing too good or great for God to give

that name.

It must be borne in mind that there is no test surer than this thing of prayer of our being in the family of God. God's children pray. They repose in Him for all things. They ask Him for all things--for everything. The faith of the child in the father is evinced by the child's asking. It is the answer to prayer which convinces men not only that there is a God, but that He is a God who concerns Himself about men, and about the affairs of this world. Answered prayer brings God nigh, and assures men of His being. Answered prayer is the credentials of our relation to and our representative of Him. Men cannot represent God who do not get answers to prayer from Him.

The possibilities of prayer are found in the illimitable promise, the willingness and the power of God to answer prayer, to answer all prayer, to answer every prayer, and to supply fully the illimitable need of man. None are so needy as man, none are so able and anxious to supply every need and any need as God.

Preaching should no more fully declare and fulfill the will of God for the salvation of all men, than should the prayers of God's saints declare the same great truth as they wrestle in their closet for this sublime end. God's heart is set on the salvation of all men. This concerns God. He has declared this in the death of His Son by an unspeakable voice, and every movement on earth for this end pleases God. And so He declares that our prayers for the salvation of all men are well pleasing in His sight. The sublime and holy inspiration of pleasing God should ever move us to prayer for all men. God eyes the closet, and nothing we can do pleases Him better than our large-hearted, ardent praying for all men. It is the embodiment and test of our devotion to God's will and of our sympathetic loyalty to God.

In 1 Tim. 2:13 the apostle Paul does not descend to a low plane, but presses the necessity of prayer by the most forceful facts. Jesus Christ, a man, the God-man, the highest illustration of manhood, is the Mediator between God and man. Jesus Christ, this Divine man, died for all men. His life is but an intercession for all men. His death is but a prayer for all men. On earth, Jesus Christ knew no higher law, no holier business, no diviner life, than to plead for men. In Heaven He knows no more royal estate, no higher theme, than to intercede for men. On earth He lived and prayed and died for men. His life, His death and His exaltation in Heaven all plead for men.

Is there any work, higher work for the disciple to do than His Lord did? Is there any loftier employment, more honourable, more divine, than to pray for men? To take their woes, their sins, and their perils before God; to be one with Christ? To break the thrall which binds them, the hell which holds them and lift them to immortality and eternal life?