

THE SAVIOUR'S INVITATION

And Other Evangelistic Sermons

by

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SERMON SIX

CONQUERING PRAYER

“And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us: and if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him. If any man see his brother sin a sin which is not unto death, he shall ask, and he shall give him life for them that sin not unto death. There is a sin unto death: I do not say that he shall pray for it” (I John 5:14-16).

John knew the heart of Jesus. Paul knew the mind of Jesus. John knew Jesus more intimately than did Paul. John had seen Him, touched Him, heard Him, watched His marvelous works of grace and power. Paul was the greater theologian, but John had more feeling. I owe John the greater debt, because it was through the reading of John that I started on the road to becoming a Christian.

Someone said in my hearing, “If you want to know Christianity in a hurry, read John.”

One of our greatest problems is: Does God answer every prayer? If you call “no” an answer, then it is “yes,” God answers every prayer. If you call “wait awhile” an answer, then it is “yes” again. If you call “get right with God first” an answer, then it is “yes” once more. Not everything that we call prayer is prayer. Talking is not praying. I can tell you without the slightest hesitation, by the authority of God’s Word, that God answers every prayer. There is no question about it. There are three things involved in real prayer. Remember, I said real prayer. If we really prayed we should move mountains. These three details are essential.

First, prayer is conditional. Every prayer carries with it a condition. Your approach to God carries a condition. It is a threefold condition.

First, we must have cleanness of heart. **“If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me.”** We must have cleanness of mind, heart, life, purpose and all else that constitutes cleanness in relationship to God, in the sight of God. If there is unconfessed sin in our souls, if we are clinging to some idol, if there is something wrong in our lives, we may talk, but we cannot pray. God will not hear us. We are wasting time and energy. We are insulting God. We are cheapening religion. We are belittling grace. We are presuming on love.

Second, we must have faith. **“Without faith it is impossible to please [God], for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.”** Faith is a required condition for prayer.

When I first started to preach, I used to think that faith could be obtained by saying, “Day by day in every way I am getting better and better.” I thought that if I said often enough, “I am getting more and more faith, I am getting more and more faith,” I would eventually have enough faith to move mountains. But this was not so. The more I talked, the less faith I had. One day I read in Romans 10 that **“faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God.”** There are two ways to get more faith: by studying God’s Word; by eating the bread of life and exercising the faith which you already have. Both these methods are essential, and both must be practiced. If you gave your children wholesome and nutritious food but did not allow them to exercise, they would become weak and eventually die. They must exercise to grow. The same is true of faith. If you have faith but do not use it, it will not become strong. Read God’s Word and your faith will grow. Exercise trust in God’s promises and your faith will become robust.

The third condition is obedience. Not only cleanness of life, not only faith, but obedience is essential. **“And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight.”** Even the Lord Jesus Christ when He prayed said, **“Not my will, but thine, be done.”** Even the Lord Jesus Christ learned obedience by suffering.

I can say without the slightest hesitation that obedience is the greatest condition for prayer. If you get down on your knees and pray, “God, give us a revival,” and are not willing to pay for it with your heart’s blood, you are wasting your time because God will not hear you. If you say and mean it, “I am willing to pay the price for a revival,” it will come. God will send it. There is no doubt of it. If your church does not grow, if your Sunday school does not flourish, if results are tragically disheartening, there is a reason for it. No one is stretched out on the altar. There is no passionate, utter submission to God’s will, that He may use you to answer your own prayers. Many people are not willing to pray because they are not willing to do the will of God.

Prayer is costly. It costs more than any other practice, more than any other form of worship. Selfishly, physically, I would rather preach for two hours than pray for one hour. When I get down on my knees, when God shows me the polluted sinner I am, it is not pleasant. That is why many people will not pray. The Holy Spirit continues to condemn them for their sins; they are not willing to give them up, and so they will not pray.

When you pray with a burdened soul, when you think of all the backslidden hosts in our churches, of all of the hundreds and thousands of lost souls all about you, without God, without Christ; when you think of how small and weak you are, how very little you can really do, when you realize how utterly helpless and dependent you are, your heart almost breaks. You grow weak with the agony of it.

Prayer costs time. Some people, women especially, say, “I pray all the time. I pray when I sweep. I pray when I wash dishes. I pray when I care for the children.”

That's not what the Bible teaches. Jesus said, "**When thou prayest, enter into thy closet.**" If the President were to come into your home, you would sit down, watch him, listen to him, talk to him. You would not be washing dishes, or cooking, or sweeping, or making beds. Prayer costs time. People excuse themselves from spending much time in prayer by saying that they are not heard for their much speaking. That does not mean that we are not heard for our much praying. This refers to our much babbling, our much repeating. If we are not heard for our much praying, why did Jesus pray all night? Why does the Bible tell us to pray without ceasing? No, prayer is power. Much prayer is much power. Little prayer is little power. No prayer is no power. As a rule, your power will be in proportion to your praying time.

It costs thought also to pray, not only time, but thought. You cannot rush into the presence of God, and present a variety of petitions in a haphazard way. I am interested in China. I am also interested in Africa. I give to missions. I was a foreign mission volunteer when I was in the seminary, but God decided otherwise. My heart is burdened for India, for Brazil, but it is more burdened for the Americans here in our United States, because I am watching them go on in sin, lost, on the road to hell. I would like to see a world-revival. God knows I am doing my best to pay the price for it. But my chief concern is for a revival in our own country, now, during these days. If you are really praying, your heart will lift itself to God in definite, purposeful petition. You will beseech the throne of grace for the one or two things uppermost in your soul. You can tell when a man is really in earnest. His tone of voice, the tenor of his words will tell you clearly enough. When he prays aimlessly, purposelessly, without direction, we may know he has not given much thought to his prayer.

Prayer costs not only time, not only thought, but it costs toil. When you get ready to pray, the telephone will ring, the laundryman will appear, the paper boy will come to collect, the beans will start to burn. There will be all sorts of interruptions, everything the Devil can contrive to put in your way. The Devil is most afraid of you when you are on your knees.

Make up your mind that you will pay the price, no matter what the consequences may be. God will let no harm come to you or yours when you are really praying. He will take care of the outcome. Never interrupt your prayer periods. Resist any suggestion of Satan. Wait upon the Lord. Let Him search your heart, try your soul, convict you of your sin, condemn you for your shortcomings, cleanse you, purge you in the white heat of His passion and purpose for you. Prayer may cause you spiritual suffering but it is eminently worth it.

Prayer is not only conditional and costly, but it is conquering. For the past eight years I have gone from one end of this land to the other. I have seen tens of thousands of souls come to Christ in revival after revival. I will tell you why. There is no secret to it. There is nothing to my preaching. There is little to my life. But I believe that God answers prayer, and I strive to practice it. I believe in prayer. Prayer conquers.

- It will conquer self.
- It will conquer sin.
- It will conquer Satan.

The biggest problem I have in all the world is Hyman Appelman. Everything else is trivial alongside of the problems I have with myself. My own soul, my own sins, my own shortcomings, my own lack of faith—these are my biggest obstacles. But, thank God, in prayer I can make Hyman Appelman fit for the use of God. I can study the Bible, and preach, and visit, and still not overcome myself. But on my knees in prayer, the Lord straightens me out. It is the prayer closet that will keep us from being castaways after we have preached to, taught, and served others.

Prayer will conquer circumstances. Lack of talent, lack of training, lack of equipment, lack of help, lack of opportunities—all can be conquered through prayer. Prayer will build your Sunday school. Prayer will fill your auditorium. Prayer will raise your money. Prayer will do everything necessary in the development of the kingdom of God. The power of the churches of any city could be multiplied a thousand times by prayer. We can conquer everything—the world, the flesh, the Devil, all obstacles—by prayer. Prayer is our mightiest asset. Prayer is our mightiest shield. Prayer is the mightiest weapon forged in the arsenals of heaven.

Prayer will not only conquer self, will not only conquer circumstances, but it will conquer sinners. **“If any man see his brother sin a sin which is not unto death, let him ask, and he shall give him life for them that sin not unto death.”** We can do more to win the lost to the Lord Jesus Christ on our knees in prayer than in any other way. That is the changeless, universal testimony of all soulwinners.

Now there is but one more word, one more question I must press upon your souls. Do you believe that the Bible is the Word of God? Do you believe Jesus meant it when He said, **“Ask, and ye shall receive?”** Do you believe that God answers prayer? Are you willing to pay the price of prayer?

Let us plead with God in importunate prayer that He may start a conflagration which will sweep like a prairie fire over this entire nation to the ends of the earth. Let us not limit God by our unbelief, by our small concern, by our narrow compassion, by our faltering zeal. Let us claim victory over Satan, for God’s Word declares:

“Thus saith the Lord, the Holy One of Israel, and his Maker, Ask me of things to come concerning my sons, and concerning the work of my hands command ye me.”

God is still on the throne. His promises are still yea and amen in the Lord Jesus Christ. Let us therefore utilize the power of prayer—conquering prayer.

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