A QUEST FOR SOULS

Comprising all the Sermons Preached and Prayers Offered in a Series of Gospel Meetings, Held In Fort Worth, Texas, June 11-24, 1917

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One -

UNOFFERED AND UNANSWERED PRAYER

OPENING SERVICE, MONDAY EVENING, JUNE 11, 1917

Text: "Ye have not, because ye ask not. Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts" - (James 4: 2, 3).

Before the reading of the Scriptures, I would be allowed a moment in which to express my grateful joy for the privilege of spending several days, the Lord willing, in daily special meetings in this city. I am glad thus to be the guest of the two noble churches, the Broadway and College Avenue Churches, and to be associated with their cherished and nobly capable pastors, Drs. Smith and Edwards. Their generous words of welcome very deeply touch my heart.

Just one concern have I in coming for this brief visit - if I know my own heart - and that is to help the people, if I may and as I may, and so to witness for our great, good Master as shall be pleasing in His sight. I am not an evangelist, as these honored fellow-pastors have already explained to you, but a busy pastor, in a modern city like yours, dealing with the same problems as those with which your pastors and churches are constantly dealing. Right at the beginning of these, services, I would cast myself upon your most prayerful sympathy. I would appeal to you in the beseeching words of the apostle: "I beseech you, brethren, for the Lord Jesus Christ's sake, and for the love of the Spirit, that ye strive together with me in your prayers to God for me." Together, let us continually look to GOD for His guidance and blessing, in everything that is to be said and done in these proposed meetings.

All of the evening services of this series of meetings were held in a tent provided by the Broadway and College Avenue Baptist Churches, and all of the noon services were held in the Auditorium of the Chamber of Commerce.

What do we here without GOD's light and leading? Oh, may the Divine Spirit teach us and empower us, at every step, as we address ourselves to these services! And He will, if only our hearts, our motives, our attitude shall be right in GOD's sight - if we shall be humble before Him, and shall eschew every evil way, and shall desire above all else to know and to do Christ's holy

will.

Assembled here with one accord, Calmly we wait thy promised grace, The purchased of our dying Lord, Come, HOLY GHOST, and fill this place.

Let us deeply ponder these sayings: "Ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me, both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth." "Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the LORD of Hosts." "If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him." Above all else, and without ceasing, let us seek the guidance and power of the HOLY SPIRIT, both in the public services and in the private efforts that are to be had, in everything pertaining to these meetings.

You are now ready, I trust, to give reverent heed to the reading of two passages from the Holy Scriptures.

The first is from the eleventh chapter of Luke. I read from the first to the fourteenth verse:

"And it came to pass, that, as He was praying in a certain place, when He ceased, one of His disciples said unto Him, Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples. And He said unto them, When ye pray, say, Our Father which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, as in heaven, so in earth. Give us day by day our dally bread. And forgive us our sins: for we also forgive everyone that is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. And He said unto them, Which of you shall have a friend, and shall go unto him at midnight, and say unto him, Friend, lend me three loaves: for a friend of mine in his journey is come to me and I have nothing to set before him? And he from within shall answer and say, Trouble me not: the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed: I cannot rise and give thee. I say unto you, though he will not rise and give him, because he is his friend, yet because of his importunity he will rise and give him as many as he needeth. And I say unto you, Ask, and it shall be given you: seek and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: for every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened. If a son shall ask bread of any of you that is a father, will he give him a stone? or if he ask a fish, will he for a fish give him a serpent? Or if he shall ask an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your Heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him?"

The second passage is from the fifth chapter of James, from the sixteenth verse to the end of the chapter:

Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much. Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain: and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven

gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit. Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth and one convert him; let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins."

In casting about for a suitable word to speak at the beginning of these meetings, it has seemed to me that I could bring no more appropriate and important word than to direct your attention to the vital subject of prayer.

The text for the message this evening is in the fourth chapter of James, and these are its two statements: "Ye have not, because ye ask not. Ye ask and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts." The text says two things very pungently.

The first is that we do not pray enough: "Ye have not, because ye ask not."

The second is <u>an explanation for unanswered prayer</u>: "Ye ask and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts."

The two sentences challenge our attention to unoffered prayer and unanswered prayer. Let us for a little while consider the teaching of the two sentences.

And first, we do not pray enough: "Ye have not, because ye ask not," There is no mistaking the meaning of this sentence. It plainly tells us: "Ye have not, because ye ask not." We talk much about "unanswered" prayer. This sentence reminds us of <u>unoffered prayer</u>. It tells us that blessings are denied us, just because we do not ask for them.

Let me ask you the pointed, personal question: How much do you pray? What must your answer be? How much have you prayed to-day? How much time and thought do you give to prayer? How real and vital is prayer in your daily life? Do you know what it is, like Daniel, to have fixed times and places for prayer? Do you know what it is to live in the atmosphere of prayer, that is, to carry out the Bible injunction to us, to "**pray without ceasing?**" Is it not just at this point that we fail, and fail more hurtfully than at any other point? I make bold to say that just at this point, preachers are prone to fail, as perhaps at no other point. A little while ago, I was with a group of preachers one day, as they discussed the perils and problems of the preacher. This man and that suggested this peril and that, concerning which the preacher needs ever to be on his guard. When it came my time to question the group of fellow-preachers, this was my question: "How much do you pray?"

I may add that every man of us in that group felt conscience-stricken, as we searched our hearts on that question.

We saw that we were busy here and there, finding texts, making sermons, arranging for funerals, for committees, for visits, for interviews, for exacting and endless tasks, but not a man of us had made enough of prayer. What is your answer, oh fellow-Christian, to the question: "How much do you pray?"

Think again and deeply of these words of Jesus: "But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy

Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly." Do you have the daily habit of secret prayer? You cannot afford to neglect such habit.

Such neglect cannot be atoned for, whatever else you may say or do. I press the question upon every Christian before me - has "the closet with the closed door" been neglected? That closet with the closed door is the trysting place of power. The men and women who go in there come out with faces that shine, with visions that inspire, and with power that shakes the world. Keep the path worn to that closet with the closed door, I pray you. It will give you to know that you are not alone, but that a Divine Presence goes before you and with you.

In view of the mighty significance of prayer, everywhere set out in the Bible, is it not indeed amazing that we do not pray more? Like a golden thread, the efficacy of prayer may be seen all through GOD's blessed Book. GOD's cry to mankind is for them to call unto Him, and He will answer them, and He will show them great and mighty things which they do not know. Listen to this exhortation from the Apostle James: "If any of you lack wisdom" surely that is what we all do sorely lack - "let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not, and it shall be given him. But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea, driven with the wind and tossed." And listen to this exhortation from JESUS: "And I say unto you, Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. For everyone that asketh, receiveth; and he that seeketh, findeth; and to him that knocketh, it shall be opened." Then, Jesus goes on to make an argument for prayer that is irresistibly appealing. Note His words: "If a son shall ask bread of any of you that is a father, will he give him a stone? Or if he ask a fish, will he for a fish give him a serpent? Or if he shall ask an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him?"

It is needful for us to remember that prayer is far more than a privilege. To be sure, it is that - a privilege priceless, a privilege incomparable, one of the highest privileges that shall ever be allowed us. But it is far more than a privilege - it is a bounden obligation, it is an inescapable duty. See how JESUS puts it: "Men ought always to pray, and not to faint." Mark that word "ought." That means duty, that means obligation. Neglect of prayer is neglect of duty - a duty of measureless importance. Prayer brings results. Prayer wins victories. Prayer achieves. Thus does Paul put it: "Ye also helping together by prayer for us." A way whereby we may help everybody, and perhaps the best way, is to pray for them. Thus may we help people at any time and at all times. It is no wonder therefore that Paul said: "I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men."

It is, indeed, a culpable matter if we neglect to pray for the people, for all of them, for any of them. And therefore, are the words of the old prophet Samuel always pertinent: "Moreover, as for me, God forbid that I should sin against the LORD in ceasing to pray for you." Do not, I pray you, deal with this great question of prayer as wicked men dealt with it in Job's day. They asked contemptuously: "What profit should we have if we pray unto Him?"

If such question is yours, face it frankly, probe it deeply; stop not your questioning until you are assured as to the efficacy that there is in prayer. There is profit in prayer. It is worth while to call on God. If some one suggests to you that prayer is irrational, in that it suggests interference with

law, it is enough to know that GOD is above law, that law is His tool, that GOD's reserves of wisdom and power and mercy and love are utterly beyond our measuring. Prayer is not only to the last degree reasonable, but our very nature demands it. It was not strange that a very wicked man said to me, when his child lay ill at death's door: "Oh, man, if you know how to pray, for GOD's sake, pray for my child!" Yes, prayer is reasonable and necessary, and it is both a privilege and a duty of measureless moment in the earthly life.

Much is heard these days on the subject of conservation. The doctrine of waste is being everywhere reprobated. The doctrine of conservation is being everywhere emphasized. We are being told, and properly so, that our waters must be preserved against the times of drought. We are properly exhorted to remember that not one tree or bush should be cut down without a good reason. It is urged that even the by-products everywhere shall be saved. And just now the whole land rings with the doctrine of the conservation of all foods, that the world crisis through which we are passing may be worthily met by all the people. Let this doctrine of conservation be applied in the realm of prayer. "Ye have not, because ye ask not." How different things might have been if we had prayed more!

Take this incident: A young man in a certain city committed a crime that broke his parents' hearts and will give them sorrow to their grave. A pastor in that community went at once to see the parents, when he knew of their poignant sorrow. As best he could, he counselled and comforted them. At last the sorrowing mother said: "Oh, sir, if I had prayed as I ought, this tragedy would not have been!" The pastor begged her not thus to upbraid herself, for her sorrow was deep enough without such added self-reproaches. But the mother protested: "I used to pray every morning, noon and night, for this boy, but that was in the other years. In recent years, my feet have been caught in the meshes of worldliness, and the things of religion have been given no practical place in my life. I have forsaken the church and neglected to pray. Oh, sir, I am to blame for my boy's downfall! It would not have come if I had remembered to be faithful in prayer."

Will you say that she did not speak the truth? Oh, how different things might have been if we had prayed as we ought! "One of my keenest regrets," said one of our noblest preachers as he lay dying, "is that I have not prayed more." And when another of our mightiest preachers was told that he had but one remaining hour on earth to live, he said: "Let me spend that hour in prayer." Oh, let us pray more! Let us pray more! "The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much." Trace that truth in the case of Elijah. Prayer is probably the highest, creative function in a human life. Tennyson was right when he said that more things are wrought by prayer than this world ever dreams.

Let us pray more! Prayer is the first agency we are to employ for the promotion of any spiritual undertaking. Prayer links us with God. "Without me ye can do nothing." "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me." Prayer breaks down difficulties. It opens fast-closed doors. It calls forth workers: "Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that He will send forth labourers into His harvest." It releases energies for the spread of Christ's kingdom and truth, beyond anything any of us can ever measure. It brings victory in hours of crisis. It gives power to the preached gospel. All this was illustrated in the lives of Abraham, and Elijah, and Hezekiah, and Samuel, and David, and Paul, and Livingstone, and Luther, and a host of other heroes of faith, all of them overcoming by believing prayer. Oh, let us pray more!

The world is in supreme need of intercessory prayer. Surely, that is awfully true in this hour of World crisis. Every hour now is big with destiny. On every side the people are trembling as they think of what shall be on the morrow, and, their hearts are failing and ready to faint. Let us pray more! There is no voice to satisfy but the voice of God.

That noble prophet of God, Dr. Charles E. Jefferson, spoke faithfully, a little while ago, when he called attention to the fact that in America, "we have suffered a heart-breaking disillusionment. We expected great things from liberty and education, and have found they are broken reeds. Neither our wealth nor our science has given us either peace or joy. The four wizards - liberty and education and wealth and science - have performed their mightiest miracles under our flag; but they cannot do the one thing essential; they cannot keep the conscience quick, or the soul alive to GOD. Our sins are as scarlet and our vices are red like crimson, and we need prophets to turn the nation to the GOD who will abundantly pardon."

Oh, let us pray more! Let us seek to-day, and every day, to help all the people by prayer. "Ye have not, because ye ask not."

Your earnest attention is now directed to the second sentence in the text: "Ye ask and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts," or pleasures. In that one sentence is one clear explanation why prayer is often unanswered. It proceeds from a wrong motive. "Ye ask and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts." The point is plain - the motive is wrong. GOD looks ever for the motive, in all our thoughts and prayers and deeds. He does not see as man sees. Man looks on the outward appearance. GOD looks on the heart. The motive oxygenizes everything in life. If the motive in prayer be wrong, then the reason why the prayer is not answered is at once explained. What is your motive when you ask GOD for this or that? I press that question upon every life before me.

A wrong spirit toward others is also an explanation for unanswered prayer. I pause a moment, to press this point upon your every conscience. I have come to the end of twenty-four years as a pastor, and through all these years I have increasingly seen how men and women are hindered in their religious lives, in their praying, in every good way, by a wrong spirit toward others. In that model prayer which Jesus gives for the guidance of His disciples, that same point of our relations toward our fellows is magnified: "Forgive us our debts (sins), as we forgive - as we have already forgiven - our debtors (those who have sinned against us)."

Are you wrong in your spirit toward others? Do you have malice, ill will, resentment, unforgiveness in your heart toward others? If so, your unanswered prayers are at once explained.

One said to me, after an extended conversation: "Why cannot I get right with GOD?"

He had once been a joyful, victorious Christian, but now he was unhappy, and shorn of his spiritual power, and prayer was no longer a blessed experience with him. "Why cannot I get right with GOD?" he plaintively asked. Before the conversation was ended, he dropped one sentence that indicated the depth of his ill will toward another. The reason why he was not right with GOD was at once made plain. Our lives are most intimately bound up with the lives of our fellows. Our relations to our fellows cannot he escaped, cannot be ignored. When we pray for

our daily bread, we are to include our fellows: "Give us this day our daily bread." If we are wrong in our hearts toward our fellows, we need not expect an answer to our prayers. How searching are these words of JESUS: "And when ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have aught against any: that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses. But if ye do not forgive, neither will your Father which is in heaven forgive your trespasses."

Still again, <u>unanswered prayer may be explained by a wrong life</u>. The psalmist said: "**If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me**." Indeed, He cannot afford to answer our prayers if we willingly harbor sin in our lives, if we regard it, if we coddle and pamper it. That would be to compromise GOD.

The one thing that separates between GOD and us is sin. He Himself so tells us. The one thing which GOD hates is sin. Our attitude toward sin must be in harmony with His attitude. It is the prayer of a righteous man - not an unrighteous man - that avails much.

The Bible teaches us that we may expect Him to hear and answer our prayers when we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight. Is your life right in GOD's sight? Are you right before Him in the secrecy of your own heart? If you are pampering some wrong thing in your life, although others may not know of it, yet in such fact: you have the explanation for your unanswered prayers. Listen to these words of the psalmist: "Delight thyself also in the Lord; and He shall give thee the desires of thine heart." You will not miss the point - your delight is to be in the Lord. Listen to these words from JESUS: "If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you." Face faithfully the question asked in the simple song, "Is thy heart right with GOD?" and know, if it is not, you have at hand an explanation for unanswered prayer.

<u>Lack of earnestness may be the explanation for unanswered prayer</u>. If we dawdle and sleep and dream over our prayers, certainly we may not hope that they shall be answered. The men of the Bible who prayed acceptably and victoriously were earnest men.

Listen to Moses, the valiant leader of Israel, as he prayed for that neglecting, backslidden, disobedient people: "Oh, this people have sinned a great sin, and have made them gods of gold. Yet now, if thou wilt forgive their sin; and if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book which thou hast written." Oh, how terribly in earnest was Moses, as thus he prayed. He was, indeed, a very Hercules in prayer.

And take the case of Paul. Listen to his pleadings: "I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Ghost, that I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart, for I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ, for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh." When a man feels like that, is willing to be accursed from Christ, that the people about him may be saved, is it any wonder that such man scaled the heavenlies when he prayed?

Listen to Jacob at the brook Jabbok, as he pleads: "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me." It is not at all surprising that a little later, Jacob is told: "Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel: for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed."

Listen to John Knox, as he prays for Scotland: "Oh, God, give me Scotland, or I die!" Is it any wonder that hapless Queen Mary said: "I fear the prayers of John Knox more than I fear an army of ten thousand men." Oh, my fellow-Christians, let us be deeply in earnest when we come to the throne of grace to make known our requests unto GOD.

Once again, <u>our prayers are often not answered</u>, because we do not expect them to be - because of a lack of faith.

Faith is just taking God at His Word. Often we do not take Him at His Word. We halt and haggle over His Word, and we refuse to accept it and to act upon it. JESUS pointedly says to us: "According to your faith be it unto you." And again: "If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth." And again: "If two of you shall agree on earth, as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven." What a marvelous statement that is! How it challenges us to be united in prayer! Do we believe this great promise? Will we plead it in prayer, and claim it?

Years ago, when I was preaching for several days in a Southern city, I preached one morning on the text: "But without faith, it is impossible to please Him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him." At the close of the service, an elderly woman - I should say she was three score and ten years of age - rose up and said: "Preacher, do you believe what you have preached to-day?" And I replied: "Indeed, I do, for I have proclaimed GOD's Word, which Word I surely believe." "Very well," she said, "I am so glad that you believe it. I am looking for some one who believes it. You quoted in your sermon, just now, that glorious promise from JESUS: 'If two of you shall agree on earth, as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven' - do you believe that promise, and will you plead it with me?"

Before I answered, she spoke again: "It is like this: My husband is, and has long been, a captain on the boat that sails the river. He never goes to church, and is exceedingly wicked, and now he is growing old. If you will join me in pleading that promise about two agreeing, we will claim him for GOD and salvation and Heaven - will you join me?" And there I stood, thinking, wondering, searching my heart. Did I really believe that promise? Was I willing to plead it then and there, in the case just named?

And while I stood thus thinking and hesitating, a plainly dressed man, a blacksmith, rose up and said: "Auntie, I will join you in pleading that promise." And there, before us all, he walked over to her and humbly said: "Let us plead it now." They knelt in prayer, and he began to pray.

It was as simple as a little child talking to its mother. He reminded the good Saviour of the promise He had made, and insisted that they twain, there kneeling, accepted that promise, claimed it, pleaded it as they asked Him to save the aged, sinful sailor.

It was all over in a few moments. The simplicity and the pathos of it were indescribable. The people were dismissed. The day passed and the people gathered for the evening service. The preacher stood up to preach, and there before him came the old lady just described, and with her came a white-haired old man.

At the close of the sermon, the preacher asked those who desired to be Christians to come to the front pews for counsel and prayer, while the people sang. The old man was on his feet immediately, and was coming toward the front. He was talked with and prayed for that night, but all seemed utter darkness to him. Over there, to the right and the left, sat the aged wife and the middle-aged blacksmith, with faces shining like the morning.

They had a secret the rest of us did not have. They had pleaded and were claiming the promise of JESUS, and their hearts knew that all was well. The night service was ended, and the people went their ways. The old man shambled out into the darkness of the night, his soul darker even than the night. The next morning came, and the people were gathering for the service.

The preacher was alone in the study, behind the pulpit, trying to make ready for the service. There was a knock on the outer door of the study. The door was opened, and there stood the old man. And thus he began: "Sir, I can't wait for your sermon this morning. Tell me now, if you know, how I can be saved."

And there in that study, before the service, he accepted the Lord JESUS CHRIST as his Saviour, and at the morning service, an hour later, gave a testimony for CHRIST, the sweetness and glory of which will outlast the stars. What is there remarkable about this? Nothing at all, when you remember that two friends of JESUS, honestly and actually pleaded and claimed the promise of JESUS.

Oh, why is that we halt in the acceptance of the sure promises of our dear Saviour? Why are we so fearful and the possessors of such feeble faith? May God forgive us, even to-night and now, for our pitiful, miserable unbelief!

This other word, I would briefly say, in explanation of unanswered prayer- and that is, <u>our prayers are often unanswered because they lack submission to the will of God</u>. "**Thy will be done**," must be in every acceptable, victorious prayer. His will is always righteous and best, and we are to be in harmony with that will. Above all else, let us seek to know GOD's will, and ever let us pray: "**Nevertheless, not my will, but thine be done**."

Long enough have I spoken to you. Let us take the two thoughts of the text, and hide them in our hearts.

Let us pray more, oh, let us pray more! To the last degree possible, let us be worthy intercessors, seeking thus to help continually our needy, sinning, suffering world. Let us pray more! "Ye have not, because ye ask not."

And let us seek ever to pray in that way, and with that motive and spirit, that shall be well pleasing in GOD's sight. "Lord, teach us to pray! And may all the services of this proposed series of meetings be enveloped in humble, consistent, believing, victorious prayer.

Let me give you a promise that tells us how this meeting may be made glorious. It is from the seventh chapter of II Chronicles: "If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear

from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land."

Again and again, let us cry, "Lord, teach us to pray!"

THE CLOSING PRAYER

Our holy, Heavenly Father, teach us to pray. Little do we know of this blessed, glorious privilege and duty, and poor has been our behavior with reference to prayer. Forgive us, we pray thee, for our neglect, our ignorance, and our disobedience. Summon us to prayer, O our GOD, and let us refuse to be dismayed, whatever our difficulties and experiences, since GOD delights to hear and answer prayer. Give us much of thy grace and light, that we may know how to pray as we should. And in all the services of these proposed meetings, go thou with us, we humbly pray thee, and so give us thy counsel and power, that we shall wholly do thy will in all the important days that are just before us.

We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.

~ end of chapter 1 ~
