

THE GOSPEL IN EZEKIEL

Illustrated in a Series of Discourses

by

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CHAPTER TWENTY

THE NATURE, NECESSITY AND POWER OF PRAYER

I will yet for this be enquired of by the house of Israel, to do it for them (Ezekiel 36:37).

In pursuing his voyage to the shores of the new world the seaman steers southward. His object is to catch the trade wind. It blows so steadily from east to west, that having once caught it in his sails he has often nothing else to do. With his ship's head set before that wind, he is borne steadily along beneath a brilliant sun, and gently wafted over a summer sea.

His voyage is one extended, happy holiday. The thrilling cry of land comes at length from the outlook on the topmast, and he drops his anchor in some quiet bay of those lovely islands, where the waves wash coral strands, and the breezes that blow seaward from their spicy forests, come loaded with delicious perfumes.

It is not thus man reaches the shores of heaven. That landing may be a picture of his arrival—the voyage is not.

In yonder vessel, which enters the harbor with masts sprung, sails in rags, bulwarks gone, bearing all the marks of having battled with many a storm and ridden many a crested wave, and on her deck a crew of weather-beaten and worn men, happy and glad to reach the land again—behold the plight in which the believer arrives at heaven.

It is hard work to get there? No doubt of it.

- Paul, the man, in labors more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths of—
- Paul, the martyr, thrice beaten with rods, once stoned, thrice shipwrecked, in journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by his countrymen, by the heathen, in the city, in the wilderness, on the sea—
- Paul, the patient sufferer for Christ, of a life of weariness, and painfulness, and watchings, hunger, thirst, fastings, cold, nakedness—

Paul even stood alarmed, lest he himself should be a castaway and lose rewards, for, “**The righteous scarcely are saved.**”

My text summons you to prayer. But does any man think, that, by repeating a daily prayer learned long ago perhaps at his mother's knee, reading some verses of Scripture, abstaining from grosser sins, attending church on Sabbath, and the Lord's table on communion days, he is by this smooth and easy way to reach the kingdom, and receive its crown?

What says our Lord, "**The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force;**" it is the prize of men who are valiant in faith and strong in prayer—men like those who, at bugle's sound or flare of rocket, rush from the trenches, and springing into the deadly breach—leaping into the very mouth of death—fight their way on and up till their flag of victory waves above the smoke of battle.

Or, take Paul's figure of the energies and activities of the Christian life. Look at these two men, stripped to the skin, who stand face to face, confronting each other in the public arena. They have been in training for weeks and months. Strangers to the pleasures of ease and sweets of luxury, they have been on foot every day by the dawn. Abstaining from all indulgences which might enervate their frame, in hard bed, hard food, hard work, they have endured every trial which could develop their muscular powers, and add to their strength.

And now these athletes are met to contend for the prize; foot touches foot, eyes watch eyes, and their spare but sinewy and iron forms are disrobed, that nothing may impede the lightning rapidity of their movements, or lessen the power of the stroke. The signal is given. Blows fall thick as hail; and now the candidates are rolling on the ground; now they emerge from a cloud of dust to continue the fight, till one—planting a tremendous stroke on the head of his antagonist—stands alone in the arena, and amid applauses that rend the sky and waken up the distant echoes, holds the field. At this moment Paul steps forward, and, addressing Christians, says. So fight; so win, "**They do it to obtain a corruptible crown, but we an incorruptible.**"

"Woe to the man, in these old games, who allowed his competitor to catch him off his guard. Woe to the man who turned to look on father, mother, wife, or mistress. Woe to the man who lifted his eyes but for a moment from the glaring eyeball of his antagonist; that moment a ringing blow fells him to the earth—he bites the dust.

Not less does our safety depend on constant prayer and watchfulness.

- "**Be instant in prayer.**"
- "**Pray without ceasing.**"
- "**Watch and pray.**"

Ah! you will never have to offer Satan an advantage twice. Should he catch you asleep, as David caught Saul—when he put aside the spear of Abishai that gleamed in the moonlight above the unconscious sleeper, and "**Destroy him not**"—Satan will not be satisfied with carrying off spear and water-cruze, or skirt of robe; he will not be content to prove how he had you in his power, and that, like a noble enemy who declines to take advantage, of a sleeping man, he had generously left you your peace and piety.

Constant prayer, unceasing watchfulness, are what your interests imperatively demand. These the Christian life requires, and these the crown of redemption rewards. Observe how in my text God hangs all the blessings of salvation upon prayer. He says—as it ere—I have had pity upon sinners; I have provided pardon for the guilty, justification through the righteousness, and life through the death of my Son; I have promised to take away the heart of stone and replace it with one of flesh; I have promised my Spirit to sanctify, sufficient grace, a certain heaven—all these blood-bought, gracious, happy, holy blessings shall be yours, freely yours; yet not yours, unless they are sought in prayer. **“I will yet for this be enquired of by the house of Israel, to do it for them.”**

In directing your attention to prayer, let me notice—

I. *Nature itself teaches us to pray.*

Like our intuitive belief in the existence of the soul, or in man’s responsibility, there seems to be lodged in every man’s breast, what I may call an instinct to pray, and an intuitive belief in the efficacy of prayer. Prayer must be natural, because it is universal. Never yet did traveler find a nation upon earth but prayed in some form or other to some demon or god. Races of men have been found without raiment, without houses, without manufactures, without the rudiments of arts, but never without prayers; no more than without speech, human features, or human passions.

Prayer is universal, and seems to be as natural to man as the feelings which, prompt an infant to draw the milk of a mother’s bosom, and by its cries to claim a mother’s protection. Even so man is—as it were instinctively—moved to cast himself into the arms of God, to seek divine help in times of danger, and in times of sorrow to weep on the bosom of a Father who is in heaven.

Nature and necessity have wrung prayers even from an atheist’s lips.

There was a celebrated poet, who was an atheist or at least professed to be so. According to him there was no God. Very strange!

- A rude heap of bricks shot from a cart upon the ground was never seen to arrange itself into the doors, stairs, chambers, and chimneys of a house.
- The dust and filings on a brass-founder’s table had never been known to form themselves into the wheels and mechanism of a watch.
- The types loosely flung from the founder’s mould never yet fell into the form of a poem, such as Homer, or Dante, or Milton would have constructed.
- The rudest hut of Bushmen, the Indian’s simple canoe—fashioned by fire from a forest tree, the plainest clay urn, in which savage affection had enshrined the ashes of the dead, were never supposed to owe their form to the hands of chance.

Yet this man believed (if it is possible to think so) that nature’s magnificent temple was built without an architect, her flowers of glorious beauty were colored without a painter, and her intricate, complicated, but perfect machinery constructed without an intelligent mind.

According to him there was no God—the belief in a God was a delusion, prayer a base superstition, and religion but the iron fetters of a rapacious priesthood. So he held when sailing over the unruffled surface of the Ægean Sea. But the scene changed; and, with the scene, his creed. The heavens began to scowl on him; and he deep uttered an angry voice, and, as if in astonishment at this God-denying man, **“lifted up his hands on high.”**

The storm increased until the ship became unmanageable. She drifted before the tempest. The terrible cry, “breakers ahead!” was soon heard; and how they tremble to see death seated on the horrid reef—waiting for his prey! A few moments more, and the crash comes. They are whelmed in the devouring sea? No. They were saved by a singular providence. Like apprehended evils, which, in a Christian’s experience, prove to be blessings, the wave, which flung them forward on the horrid reef, came on in such mountain volume as to bear and float them over into the safety of deep and ample sea-room. But ere that happened, a companion of the atheist—who, seated on the prow, had been taking his last regretful look of heaven and earth, sea and sky—turned his eyes down upon the deck, and there, among papists, who told their beads and cried to the virgin, he saw the atheist prostrated with fear. The tempest had blown away his fine-spun speculations like so many cobwebs; and he was on his knees, imploring God for mercy. In that hour—in that terrible extremity—Nature rose in her might, asserted her supremacy, vindicated the claims of religion, smote down infidelity by a stroke, and bent the stubborn knees of atheism in lowliest prayer.

Danger may thus extort prayer; it does not follow that God will accept it. How can a man expect to have prayers accepted which are only wrung from him by the hand of danger or the fear of death? Let us translate their language? is it not this? I will serve my lusts as long as I dare. So long as I can say it safely, I will say—Evil be thou my good; my vices, be ye my gods; I will turn to religion when I can do no better.

Does Jesus stand at my door? are his locks wet with the dews of night? are his limbs weary standing? is his hand weary knocking? Till another hand is knocking there—the loud, impatient hand of death—Jesus comes not in. **“What have I to do with thee, thou Son of God?”** With thy religion—**“Art thou come to torment me before the time?”** **“Go thy way at this time: when I have a convenient season I will call for thee.”**

In the name of reason, religion, gratitude, love, is this the treatment which a Saviour deserves? Deluded sinner! “Is this thy kindness to thy friend?” Beware! What if he should mete out to us the measure we mete to him? Remember the warning—**“I have spoken, and ye have not heard; I have called, and ye have not answered; when ye speak I will not hear; when ye call I will not answer. I will laugh at your calamity, and mock when your fear cometh.”**

II. Some difficulties connected with this duty.

The decrees of God, say some, render prayer useless. Are not all things, they ask, fixed by these decrees—irrevocably fixed? By prayer I may, indeed, prevail on a man to do a thing which he has not previously resolved not to do, and even although he should have so resolved—man is changeable; and I may show him such good reasons for doing it, as to change his resolution.

But if an immutable God has foreshadowed everything by an eternal and irreversible decree, what purpose can prayer serve? Who shall change the unchangeable? Thus men have argued, saying—“What profit shall we have if we should pray unto him?”

It were not difficult to expose the fallacy of this reasoning. The objection may be entirely answered. We might show that the decrees of God embrace the means as well as the end; and since prayer is a means of grace, being a means to an end, it must be embraced within these very decrees, and cannot be excluded by them.

I content myself, however, with simply saying, that this objection is not honestly, at least not intelligently, entertained by any man. For, if the objection is good against prayer, it is good against many things besides. If it stops action in the direction of prayer—if it arrests the wheels of prayer it ought to stop the wheels of our daily business.

If a good objection against prayer, it is an equally good objection to ploughing, sowing, taking meat or medicine, and a thousand other things. Might not an unwilling or indolent husbandman, in spring, as well ask, what is the use of sowing? Has not God ordained everything? If I am to have a harvest—if he has decreed a harvest for my farm—then, although no ploughshare turn up a furrow, nor sower walks its fields, they shall wave in autumn with golden corn.

Or might not one, who sickens at the sight of noxious drugs, as well say. Take these away, I'll drink no more of them. Has not God ordained everything? Can a sparrow fall to the ground without the Father? If God has decreed that I am to live, come cholera, fever, pestilence, I shall live; if he has decreed otherwise, all the medicines of the apothecary, and the skill of science will not avail to save me, or add one grain to the sands of my existence. Did any man in his sober senses ever reason so? With that simple question we dismiss this objection.

Others, more earnest and honest, reading that “**without faith it is impossible to please God,**” reading—and misunderstanding what they read—“**he who doubteth is damned**”—say that, from want of faith, their prayers must be useless. Most false reasoning! What says the Apostle?—“**I will that men pray every where.**” “**God will have all men to be saved.**”

We take, like little children, the simple word, nor trouble ourselves with the metaphysics of the question. If you were sufficiently alive to your danger, these difficulties would have no more power to hold you than the meshes of a spider's web.

I knew of one who, while wandering along a lonely and rocky shore at the ebb of tide, slipped his foot into a narrow crevice. Fancy his horror on finding that he could not withdraw the imprisoned limb! Dreadful predicament!

There he sat, with his back to the shore, and his face to the sea. Above his head seaweed and shells hung upon the crag—the too sure signs that when yonder turning tide comes in, it shall rise on him inch by inch, till it washes over his head. Did he cry for help? Does any man dream of asking such a question? None heard him. But, Oh, how he shouted to the distant boat! how his heart sank as her yards swung round, and she went off on the other tack! how his cries sounded high above the roar of breakers!

How bitterly he envied the white seamew her wing, as, wondering at this intruder on her lone domains, she ailed above his head, and shrieked back his shriek! how, hopeless of help from man, he turned up his face to heaven, and cried loud and long to God! All that God only knows. But as sure as there was a terrible struggle, so sure, while he watched the waters rising inch by inch, these cries never erased till the wave swelled up, and washing the dying prayer from his lips, broke over his head with a melancholy moan.

There was no help for him. There is help for us, although fixed in sin as fast as that man in the rock. Whether we have true faith, may be a question which is not easily settled; but to pray is a clear and commanded duty. The “help. Oh, help, Lord,” never yet rose from an anxious heart, but it was heard, and accepted in heaven. And if Satan bids me hold my peace—as the disciples bade the blind man—I bid him hold his own. I refuse to be silent; I but cry the louder, “**Jesus, thou Son of David, have mercy on me.**” In God’s hands when he is smiting, let me be “**dumb, opening not the mouth.**”

In my Father’s arms I may lie and do nothing but weep—weep upon his loving bosom; but in the arms of this mortal and malignant enemy, who has seized me, and is carrying me off to prison and pit—a lamb bleating in the lion’s jaws—“**I will cry unto the Lord, and he will answer me, and send help from above, and deliver me.**”

III. *Prayer must be earnest.*

The public become suspicious even of good money when coiners have pushed their base metal into wide circulation. Even so, religion falls into disrepute, and the character of piety suffers in the eyes of the world, when the church swarms with pretenders and false professors. And in like manner, the value of prayer has fallen in the eyes of men in consequence of many prayers which are offered being rejected by God, because they are not genuine. Hence prayer comes to be held in light esteem, and I—if I might so speak—the bills drawn on the bank of heaven being dishonored, man says—“Who is the Lord, that I should serve him, or what profit shall I have if I pray unto him?”

Among other gross and venal impieties, the Church of Rome sells prayers. By her prayer-market she converts God’s house into a house of merchandise and a den of thieves. Her prayers—although their price, like that of other goods, varies with the locality—may be bought for money, under this general rule of the market, that the praying shall correspond to the paying. The rude Tartar saves his money by a practice that achieves the object just as well, or rattier that fails as completely to do anything but deceive the blind. He cuts a cylinder from a block of wood. Upon its surface he writes a series of prayers; and then he runs an axle through the cylinder, and fitting it up so that it shall keep turning like a mill-wheel in the running stream, he sets it in motion. He goes away on his hunt, to the pursuit of war, business, or pleasure, and reckons that, whether he sleeps or wakes as the wheel goes round, and the prayers in its revolution turn up to the eye of the skies, heaven reads them there, and God accepts the prayers of the dead cylinder for the desires of a living heart.

Prayers without wishes are like birds without wings; while the eagle soars away to heaven, these never leave the ground. It is the heart that prays—not the knees, nor the hands, nor the lips. Have not I seen a dumb man, who stood with his back to the wall, beg as well with his imploring eye and open hand, as one that had a tongue to speak? If you would have your prayers accepted, they must be arrows shot from the heart. None else mount to the throne of God. You may repeat your prayers every day; you may be punctual as a Mohammedan who, at the Mullah's call from the minaret of the mosque, drops on his knees in public assembly or the crowded street. What then? The prayer of the lip, tongue, memory, of the wandering mind, in its dead formality, are, in the sight of God, no better than the venal prayers of Rome, or the revolutions of the Tartar's wheel
“The sacrifice of the hypocrite is an abomination to the Lord.”

Would you see true prayer—would you know what prayer really is? step into this Egyptian palace where Benjamin stands bound—his amazed and trembling brothers grouped around the lad? Judah advances. He bows himself before Joseph. His heart is full. His lip trembles. The tear glistens in his manly eye; and now, with tenderness thrilling in every tone, he pours forth this plea of surpassing pathos—

“Oh my lord, let thy servant, I pray thee, speak a word in my lord's ears, and let not thine anger burn against thy servant: My lord asked his servants, saying, Have ye a father, or a brother? and we said unto my lord, We have a father, an old man, and a child of his old age, a little one; and his brother, is dead; and he alone is left of his mother, and his father loveth him.”

Thus on he goes; and every sentence goes like a knife into Joseph's heart. And then he closes and crowns his appeal with this most brave and generous proposal, **“Now, therefore, I pray thee, let thy servant abide instead of the lad, a bondsman to my lord; for how shall I go to my father, and the lad be not with me, lest I see the evil that shall come on my father?”**

Joseph's heart, which has been swelling with emotion, is now ready to burst. He can stand it no longer; nor any wonder. That is prayer; and could we bring such earnestness to Jesus, Oh, how would his tender, much more tender heart melt, like wax, before it. Did we approach him with the fervor that glowed and burned in Judah's speech; did we plead for our own souls or those of others, with such tears, in such tones, as Judah's when he pleaded for Benjamin, how would a divine brother discover himself to us.

Now turn from that Egyptian to this Hebrew palace. There also is prayer. Two women stand before King Solomon. In the darkness of the night one has crept, with noiseless step, to her neighbor's bed, and while the mother slept, and the babe slept in her bosom, softly, cautiously, she steals the living child, and leaves her own cold, dead infant in its place.

They carry the dispute to Solomon—each claiming the living, and each repudiating the dead. With a skill that earned him his world-wide fame, the wise monarch summons nature as a witness. Horrible to hear, he orders the living child to be divided. The sword is raised—another moment, and each mother gets a quivering half—another moment, and interference comes too late.

One stands calm, firm, collected, looking on with a cruel eye. With a bound that carries her to his feet, and a shriek that rings wild and high over all the palace, the other—the true mother—clasps her hands in agony, and cries—“**Oh, my lord, give her the living child, in no wise slay it.**”

That is prayer. That cry, that spring, that look of anguish—all these proclaim the mother—how different from the cold, callous, unimpassioned frame in which, alas! the best too often present themselves at the throne of grace, as if, when we are seeking pardon, it were a matter of supreme indifference whether our prayer were or were not answered. Oh! how should we pray that God would help us to pray, and touch our icy lips with a live coal from off his altar.

IV. Prayer is powerful.

An angel, says our great poet, keeping ward and watch on the battlements of heaven, caught sight of Satan as he flew on broad wing from hell to this world of ours. The celestial sentinel shot down like a sunbeam to the earth, and communicated the alarm to the guard at the gates of paradise. Search was made for the enemy, but for a time without success. Ithuriel entered the bower, whose flowery roof “showered roses which the morn repaired,” and where our first parents, “lulled by nightingales, embracing, slept.” There he saw a toad sitting, squat by the ear of Eve. His suspicions were awakened. In his hand was a spear that had the celestial power of revealing truth, unmasking falsehood, and making all things to stand out in their genuine colors. He touched the reptile with it. That instant the toad—which was breathing horrid dreams into the ear of Eve—changed, its shape, and there, confronting him face to face, stood the proud, malignant, haughty form of the Prince of Darkness.

With such a spear as that with which Milton, in this flight of fancy, arms Ithuriel, prayer arms us. Are we in doubt whether a thing is right or wrong?

Are we indulging in pleasures, or engaged in pursuits, with which we are not altogether satisfied, and yet are not ready decidedly to condemn, and promptly to abandon? In any matter of Christian morals, are we halting between two opinions? The simplest and shortest way of determining the doubt is to apply the test of prayer. Take the subject to God. Look at your pleasures and your practices in the light of his countenance. Examine the matter on your knees. Can you make it a subject of prayer? Ah! be sure you are not safe in the place for which you cannot ask God to accompany you. Be sure that that good (as the world may call it) is bad—that pursuit or enjoyment, however gainful or pleasant, is an evil—upon which you cannot implore God’s blessing, and for which you dare not go to a throne of grace, and give God thanks.

Is this test of universal application? is everything, then, to be made a subject of prayer? Certainly. So thought Fowell Buxton, even of those amusements with which, in holiday times, he was wont to brace up mind and body for noble labors in the cause of God and his country. So thought that Corsican patriot, who never went down to battle till he had gone down to his knees, nor ever leveled a rifle that never missed, without praying for the soul he was about to send into eternity. And so speaks Paul, when, linking peace and prayer together, he writes—“**Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God; and the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your heart and minds, through Jesus Christ.**”

Such is one of the indirect uses, and not unimportant effects of prayer. Its direct power is, in a sense, omnipotent. Prayer moves the hand that moves the world. It secures for the believer the resources of Divinity. What battles has it not fought? what victories has it not won? what burdens has it not carried? what wounds has it not healed? what griefs has it not assuaged? It is the wealth of poverty; the refuge of affliction; the strength of weakness; the light of darkness. It is the oratory that gives power to the pulpit; it is the hand that strikes down Satan, and breaks the fetters of sin; it turns the scales of fate more than the edge of the sword, the craft of statesmen, or the weight of scepters; it has arrested the wing of time, turned aside the very scythe of death, and discharged heaven's frowning and darkest cloud in a shower of blessings.

Prayer changes impotence into omnipotence; for, commanding the resources of Divinity, there is nothing it cannot do, and there is nothing it need want. It has just two limits.

The first is, that its range is confined to the promises; but, within these, what a bank of wealth, what a mine of mercies, what a store of blessings!

The second is, that God will grant or deny our requests as is best for his glory and our good.

And who that knows how we are, in a sense, but children, would wish it otherwise? My little child is angry when I pluck a knife from his hands; he doubts his father's love because he does not always kiss, but sometimes corrects him; and, turning away his head from the nauseous drug, he must be coaxed—sometimes compelled to drink the cup which, although bitter to the taste, is the restorative of health. Who that sees the child seek meat when he needs medicine, eagerly clutch at tempting but unripe fruit, prefer play, and go weeping to school, reject simple but healthful fare for some luscious, but noxious luxury, who, I say, does not feel thankful that God reserves the right of refusal, and makes his answers correspond to our wants rather than to our wishes? This limit to prayer may make poverty our lot; may bind us to a sick bed; may leave us to suffer and bleed under the stroke of an impending calamity; but—while we will get as much of earth as we need on earth—for the pardon of sin, for peace of conscience, for purity of heart, for growth in grace, for all that we need to make us meet for heaven, and at length, for insuring heaven itself, prayer secures to us the help and hand of Omnipotence.

By prayer, besides, God's children can reckon on immediate assistance. Prayer flies where the eagle never flew and rises on wings broader and stronger than an angel's. It travels further and faster than light, rising from the heart of a believer, it shoots away beyond that starry sky, and, reaching the throne, enters into the ear of God. So soon as the heart begins to work on earth, it moves the hand of God in heaven; and, ere the prayer has left the lips of faith, Jesus has presented it to his Father, and secured its answer. It is a telegraph stretched out between shore and shore—the mother country and her distant colonies, the seat of government and the far-off scene of battle—but its extended lines connect heaven and earth, man and God, the sinner and the Saviour, the humblest home of piety and a throne of grace.

That high invention of human genius, which, by its wires of iron connects distant countries together, and has, in a sense, abolished both time and space—offers but an imperfect image of a power which piety has been working before science was born—nay, ever since the world began.

From remote regions the electric telegraph may convey to a father the tidings that his child is ill; but it carries not the physician to his side, nor the drug of potent virtue which could cure his malady. It leaves him to die. It may bring to-night a detail of the fortunes of the war. Along it our army may send a cry for help—for more men and more munitions; but days and weeks must elapse, and many miles of ocean be traveled, ere ever our ships can pour their bayonets on the hostile shore; and then it may be too late; the tide may have ebbed that, taken at the full, had led on to fortune.

But does God never make his people wait? He does. Faith and patience are put upon their trial; there is no answer, nor reply, nor relief. God is silent, and the church is left to cry, “**How long, Lord, how long?**” All true. Jesus addresses to his Bride the language he of old used to his mother, “**Woman, my hour is not yet come.**” But let us need present help, and you shall see that he is “**a very present help in time of trouble.**”

- Let the disciple be sinking amid the waves of Galilee, crying, “**I perish**”;
- Let the prophet be on his knees in the depths of the sea and the dark belly of the whale;
- Let the widow’s last mite, and the barrel’s last handful have come;
- Let the confessor be descending into the lions’ roaring den;
- Let the queen have her brave hand upon the door, with these words of high resolve upon her lips, “**If I perish, I perish**”;
- Let the trembling host have the waters of the Red Sea roaring in their front, and the chariots of Egypt pressing on their rear;
- Let God’s people have reached such a crisis;
- Let them stand in any such predicament—and his answer anticipates their prayer.

The supply is on the road before the want is expressed; the door opens before the hand has struck it; while prayer is traveling up the one line, the answer is speeding down the other. Hear the voice of the Lord, “**It shall come to pass; before they call I will answer, and while they are yet speaking, I will hear.**”

V. Prayer is confident.

In speaking of Christ Jesus our Lord, Paul says, “**In whom we have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of him;**”

- “**Jesus, our High Priest, has entered within the vail, and having reconciled us to God, we have boldness to cater into the holiest by the blood of Jesus;**”
- “**Seeing, then, that we have a great High Priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession. For we have not an High Priest which cannot be touched with the feelings of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us, therefore, come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.**”

It is easy to know the knock of a beggar at one’s door.

Low, timid, hesitating, it seems to say, I have no claim on the kindness of this house; I may be told I come too often; I may be treated as a troublesome and unworthy mendicant; the door may be flung in my face by some surly servant. How different, on his return from school, the loud knocking, the bounding step, the joyous rush of the child into his father's presence, and, as he climbs his knee, and flings his arms round his neck, the bold face and ready tongue with which he reminds his father of some promised favor? Now, why are God's people bold? Glory to God in the highest! To a Father in God, to an elder brother in Christ, Faith conducts our steps in prayer; therefore, in an hour of need, Faith, bold of spirit, raises her suppliant hands, and cries up to God, "**Oh that thou wouldst rend the heavens, and come down.**"

I think that I see the sneer curling on the skeptic's lip as he says, How absurd! What presumption! as if it were not below the dignity of Divinity to come at king's or peasant's, prince's or pauper's call. Should the lofty purposes of the Eternal be shaped by your petitions? Creature of a day and of the dust! what are you, that the universe should its helm moved this or that way for your sake? Well, no doubt the language is bold; yet with God a Father, our Father, my Father in Christ, I feel I can be bold and confident in prayer.

I know a father's heart. Have I not seen the quiver of a father's lip, the tear start into his eye, and felt his heart in the grasp of his hand, when I expressed some good hope of a fallen child? Have I not seen a mother, when her infant was tottering in the path of mettled coursers, with foam spotting their necks, and fire flying from their feet, dash like a hawk across the path, and pluck him from instant death? Have I not seen a mother, who sat at the coffin-head, pale, dumb, tearless, rigid, terrible in grief, spring from her chair, seize the coffin which we were carrying away, and, with shrieks fit to pierce a heart of stone, struggle to retain her dead?

If we, that are but worms of the earth, will peril life for our children, and, when they are moldered into dust, cannot think of our dead, nor visit their cold and lonesome grave, but our breasts are wrung, and our wounds bleed forth afresh, can we adequately conceive or measure, far less exaggerate—even with our fancy at its highest strain, the paternal love of God? Talk not of what you suppose to be the dignity of Divinity. Talk not of the calm, lofty, dignified demeanor which becomes a king, who sees his child borne off on the stream that sweeps his palace wall.

The king is at once sunk in the father. Divesting himself of his trappings—casting away scepter, robe of gold, and jeweled crown, he at once rushes forth to leap into the boiling flood. Lives there a father with heart so dead that he would not, at the sight of a child fallen overboard, and struggling with death, back every sail, and, whatever might be the mission on which his ship was bound, or whatever the risk he ran, would not put up her helm, and, pale with dread, steer for the waves were his boy was sinking!

Child of God! pray on. God's people are more dear to him than our children can be to us. He regards them with more complacency than all the shining orbs of that starry firmament. They were bought at a price higher than would purchase the dead matter of ten thousand worlds. He cares more for his humblest, weakest child, than for all the crowned heads and great ones of earth, and takes a deeper interest in the daily fortunes of a pious cottage than in the fall and rise of kingdoms.

Child of God! pray on. By prayer thy hand can touch the stars, thy arm stretch up to heaven. Nor let thy holy boldness be dashed by the thought that prayer has no power to bend these skies, and bring down thy God. “When I pull on the rope which fastens my frail and little boat to a distant and mighty ship, if my strength cannot draw its vast bulk to me, I draw myself to it—to ride in safety under the protection of its guns; to enjoy in want the fullness of its stores. And it equally serves my purpose, and supplies my needs, that prayer, although it were powerless to move God to me, moves me to God. If He does not descend to earth, I—as it were—ascend to heaven.

Child of God! pray on. Were it indispensable for thy safety that God should rend these heavens, it should be done—a wondering world should see it done, I dare believe Him; and “**I am not mad, most noble Festus.**” Have not these heavens been already rent? Eighteen hundred years ago, robed in humanity, God Himself came down. These blue skies, where larks sing and eagles sail, were cleft with the wings and filled with the songs of his angel train.

Among the ancient orbs of that very firmament, a stranger star appeared, traveling the heavens, and blazing on the banner borne before the King, as he descended on this dark and distant world.

On Canaan’s dewy ground—the lowly bed he had left—the eye of morning shone on the shape and form of the Son of God; and dusty roads, and winter snows, and desert sands, and the shores and very waves of Galilee, were impressed with the footprints of the Creator, By this manger, where the babe lies cradled—beside this cross, upon whose ignominious arms the glory of the universe is hung—by this silent sepulcher, where, rapped in bloody shroud, the body is stretched but on its bed of spices, while Roman sentinels walk their moonlit round, and Death—a bound captive—sits within, so soon as the sleeper wakes, to be disarmed, uncrowned, and in himself have death put to death—faith can believe all that God has revealed, and hope for all that God has promised.

She reads on that manger, on that cross, deeply lettered on that rocky sepulcher, these glorious words—“**He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?**”

And there, lifting an eagle eye to heaven, she rises to the boldest flights, and soars aloft on the broad wings of prayer—

Faith, bold faith, the promise sees,
And trusts to that alone.
Laughs at impossibilities,
And says, it shall be done.

~ end of chapter 20 ~

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