

FERVENT IN PRAYER – WATCHING THEREUNTO

"Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance, and supplication for all saints." – Ephesians 6:18.

PRAYER is a wonderful privilege. It is a very great favor to be permitted to approach the Supreme Ruler of the Universe with our petitions. We should come, therefore, in the spirit of deep appreciation, of earnestness and humility and reverence. The greater our earnestness, the more acceptable will be our prayers, and the more abundant blessings shall we receive.

There is a great deal of formal prayer. The Scriptures speak of this as drawing near unto God with the *lips*, while the *heart* is far from Him. (Isaiah 29:13; Matthew 15:7-9.) It would be better not to approach the Lord at all than to do so in an improper manner. The man who merely utters words with His lips is not praying. A Christian should not say prayers, but should pray. We should not think of saying even one word that we do not mean and have not thought out. Many people have done themselves injury by praying in a formalistic manner.

When we come to the Father, let us draw nigh in spirit – with the heart, the understanding, the mind – whether the prayer be long or short. Let us come with true and earnest devotion, with supplication, that He may see our intense desire in the matter. As our Lord said, the Father seeketh such to worship Him as worship Him in spirit and in truth. Without the *spirit of prayer* our petitions amount to nothing.

No one may offer prayer to the Father except those who have accepted His terms, and have come into relationship with Him as sons, through the great Advocate. Others are aliens and strangers. There is a difference between worship, or thanksgiving, and

prayer. Any one may offer worship – adoration, homage. Any one may bow the knee and *express thanks* and *appreciation*. But the privilege of *making requests* of God is directly limited to those who have been accepted in Christ.

There is a difference, too, between *prayer* and *supplication*. The term *prayer* applies to *any* petition, great or small; whereas the term supplication means a special, agonizing desire for a thing – entreaty with *intense yearning*. But whether it is prayer in the ordinary sense, or intense prayer – supplication – we should always come in the spirit, with an appreciation of the fact that we are entering into the presence of the great Creator and that in thus doing we are enjoying a great privilege.

"WATCHING THEREUNTO"

St. Paul adds, "and watching thereunto." Watching seems to be an attitude of mental alertness. If we really *believe* that the Lord has indicated that we should *pray* for the things we need, and that He will give us these things, then we should be on the alert to recognize when we receive them. We should take heed as to the things for which we ask, and be *sure* that we ask for the things *promised*, the things for which we are *entitled to ask*.

We should also watch for the Lord's providential leadings. The person who, after having prayed, forgets what he prayed for, and who cannot tell whether or not he has received an answer to his petition, has certainly missed a great blessing which it is designed that he should have.

Prayer is not to be offered to be heard of man, but of God. It is intended to be a stimulation to our hearts and to quicken us to an expectancy of certain things; and it should be our earnest endeavor to keep our lives in harmony with our requests. When Jesus told His disciples to pray the Lord of the Harvest that He would send more laborers into His Harvest, He did not mean that they were to

tell the Heavenly Father His business; but that they should be solicitous that others come into the work, that God would send forth laborers into His Harvest field; and that the disciples themselves should watch for opportunities of service, in harmony with their prayers.

The Lord frequently called attention to the fact that we should be *persevering* in prayer. Perseverance is an essential quality in the sight of God. It includes patience, carefulness and interest. In short, it is related to every fruit of the Spirit which the Lord's people are to cultivate. *Patience* is good, but it needs *perseverance*. *Love* is good, but it needs *perseverance*.

Perseverance does not *make* the will. The will is already there. It is the will that God recognizes in the beginning. But by various experiences, trials, difficulties, tests of endurance, the Lord would prove us and develop us. He would have us become very positive characters in all these qualities which have His approval. So our praying should all be in the spirit, from the heart. We should watch thereunto with perseverance day by day, until the Lord shall see that we have attained the character which He can honor with a share in the Kingdom.

LESSONS LEARNED BY THE LORD'S DELAY

Perhaps one reason why our Lord does not answer our petitions quickly is that He desires us to learn to watch for the answer and thereby get the lesson of appreciation and gratitude to Him, as we realize that He has given us our request. We should therefore pray with all perseverance, watching for the answer until it come – not watching merely for a few minutes, or for a day or a week. The Lord might see best to further defer the answer to our petition, either to test our faith or to increase our earnestness and get us into a better condition to receive the blessing. It requires time to become emptied of self and prepared to receive the mind of Christ; and with some, more time is required than with others.

We are sure that the Lord will pursue that course which is best for us, just as a teacher with his pupils, and a parent with his children. The parent exercises judgment as to what is best for the child. So our Heavenly Father wishes to give us the good things. Sometimes He sees best that we wait a long time before getting the answer to our petitions; at other times He may give us a speedy answer to our prayer. Nevertheless, as the Apostle Paul declares, we know that all things are working together for our good, because we love God and have been called according to His purpose. And we must ever bear in mind the conditions which our Lord imposes: "If ye *abide in Me*, and *My words abide in you*, ye may ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you." – John 15:7.

We must search the Scriptures to know what is the mind of the Lord, what He has *promised* and what He has *not* promised. The fully consecrated will not want anything which is not in fullest harmony with the will of Him we so love and adore, and who is so worthy of our love and loyalty. We must remember, too, that while we are praying with persistence and faith, the Lord is preparing for us, not only the blessing and opportunity of service which we desire, but He is also preparing the circumstances and conditions which will bring this blessing or opportunity in the best form. This will require our *waiting on the Lord*, which should be in perfect trust and patience for His good time to grant the desire of our hearts. "The supplication of a righteous man availeth much in its working." – James 5:16. – R.V. [R5480 : page 183]

Family prayer is also very desirable in the homes of the Lord's saints, wherever possible; and prayer amongst the children of God when they assemble together is eminently proper. Our Lord sanctioned this by praying with and for His disciples; and it was also commended by the Apostles. We are to pray, not for ourselves only, but for all of the saints and for the interests of the Lord's Cause. The Scriptures commend both public and private prayer

amongst the children of God. But secret prayer is absolutely essential to the life of a Christian.

PRAYERFUL ATTITUDE ALONE NOT SUFFICIENT

We have been surprised occasionally to hear some professed follower of Christ urging the impropriety of a form of prayer in words, and of assuming any particular posture in prayer, or of praying at any stated time, asserting that kneeling in prayer is unnecessary – that all of life should be a prayer. Such a proposition is astounding to us – the logic of it is incomprehensible. True, we are to pray always, to be always in the spirit of prayer, to be so devoted to the Lord that we shall *ever* manifest in our lives the beauty of holiness, that we shall be shining lights in the world. But we hold that *no Christian* can maintain this heart attitude, or glorify God in his life, without going to the Lord in a particular and formal manner, and preferably upon his knees, and if possible in solitude at certain times. "Enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to Thy Father which is in secret." – Matthew 6:6.

Our dear Master's constant attitude of prayer did not hinder His more particular devotions when He turned aside from the busy affairs of His life to converse with the Father in secret – sometimes briefly and sometimes spending the entire night in prayer in the mountain solitude. The very isolation of the Lord from all human help drew Him the nearer and the oftener to the Father in prayer and communion. So it is, or should be, with all the true followers of the Master. As we grow in His character-likeness we will, like Him, pray without ceasing, in everything giving thanks, singing and making melody in our hearts to the Lord, recognizing Him as the center of all our hopes and our joys.

OUR "SOLITARY WAY"

We all realize at times the inability of even our dearest ones to enter fully into and appreciate our sorrows and our needs. They are unable to sympathize with us fully in our struggles and our trials. This realization should send us, as it did our dear Lord, the more frequently to the Throne of Grace, where we are always sure of having the ear of One who understands us perfectly and can make all needful allowance for our frailty; who knows the limit of our ability to do and to be, in our imperfect flesh; and who can give us the perfect sympathy which none other can give. He never fails to hear and to heed the cry of His children, even though He may for a wise purpose in love defer for a time a visible answer to their pleas.

JACOB AN EXAMPLE

The prayer of Jacob at the time he was anticipating a meeting with Esau on his return from Padan-Aram may be considered one of the most excellent examples of earnest, persevering prayer to be found in the Lord's Word. It is full of confidence and trust in God. It recounts God's Promise to his grandfather Abraham and his father Isaac and the renewal of this promise to himself. He mentions to the Lord His promise also to bring him again to his home land. His humility is shown in his words: "I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies and of all the truth which Thou hast shown unto Thy servant; for with my staff [only] I passed over this Jordan [when fleeing from home], and now I have become two bands [great companies]." – Genesis 32:10.

He tells the Lord of his fear of Esau, yet shows that his fear is offset by his confidence in the Almighty. It was at this time, and doubtless in answer to this prayer, that the angel of the Lord appeared to Jacob, and so full of faith was he in the Power of God and in His Promise to protect him and make of him a great nation, that he laid *physical hold* upon the angel, declaring: "I will not let

thee go, except thou bless me!" The angel here appeared as a man; but Jacob had recognized him as the representative of the Lord, sent to meet him.

We cannot suppose that the angel was not sufficiently powerful to release himself from the grasp of Jacob, but rather that God was pleased to bless him, and that these circumstances were designed for the very purpose of drawing out Jacob's longing desire for this blessing of the Lord, to demonstrate the depth and intensity of his desire. When this was proven, when he had manifested his deep appreciation of the blessing which God alone could give, and this great longing to be in harmony with Him, then the blessing came – Jacob's victory. God was pleased to reward such faith and energy and zeal.

LESSONS TO SPIRITUAL ISRAEL

Jacob was only a natural man, yet his prayer has in it a lesson that may be of much profit to New Creatures in Christ; not that we should wrestle with God as did Jacob, for we are *sons* of God, and *sons* have a much closer relationship than *servants*, and have no need to *wrestle* with God to gain His favor. The late Bishop Phillips Brooks expressed the true thought very beautifully and succinctly when he said, "Prayer is not *conquering* God's *reluctance*; it is *laying hold* upon God's *willingness*." We have His favor now; and He has promised us His choicest blessings. But Jacob's earnest zeal and faith and humility and his perseverance of mind are well worthy of our emulation and imitation. We should always pray and not faint, as our Lord reminded us. God wishes us to be persistent, and to have unwavering faith in His willingness to give us His best gifts.

If the blessing in answer to our prayer does not come in the moment of asking, we are to continue "instant in prayer," patiently waiting for the Lord's due time, in an attitude of entire, sweet submission to His will, assured that if the answer be delayed it is

because our Father in His wisdom sees a reason for it and has our highest welfare at heart. He is never indifferent to His children nor unheeding of their needs and of their cry for help and for fellowship with Him. But let us see to it that God's glory is our chiefest desire.

Alas, how many spiritual Israelites seem to have a much less keen appreciation of propriety in prayer than had Jacob! He asked for God's blessing, in whatever manner He might be pleased to give it. Jacob did not specify even the earthly good things which God had promised him. He desired the Lord's glory in the fulfilling to him and his posterity of His great Covenant. Many of God's children ask and receive not, because they ask amiss, that the answer may minister to the desires of their flesh. The Lord has promised to care for the temporal necessities of His children and will surely give them what is best, whether this be little or much.

How few seem to remember that as New Creatures our desires and requests should be especially for the things that pertain to our spiritual interests; that it is this class of blessings that the Father desires us to have, **[R5481 : page 184]** and has promised to give us! He assures us that as earthly parents are pleased to give good gifts to their children, so our Father delights to give us His Holy Spirit – His very best gift – the gift which comprises all blessing and glory, which will insure to us everything which is desirable, in the very highest sense. If the Lord's people who have consecrated their all to Him, could be brought to the point where their one aim in life, the burden of all their prayers, would be that they might have a larger measure of the Spirit of the Lord, the Spirit of holiness, the Spirit of Christ, the Spirit of a sound mind, what an unspeakable blessing it would mean!

ISRAEL – MIGHTY WITH GOD

Jacob got the blessing and with it a change of name. Thenceforth he was called Israel, which signifies, Mighty with

God, or "A Prince with God." This new name therefore was always a source of encouragement to him, an incentive to fresh zeal and to trust in the Lord. All of Jacob's posterity adopted this name. We have in antitype Christ Jesus, our Lord, the true Israel, the One who through faith and obedience to the Father has prevailed, who has overcome the world, the flesh and the Adversary, and has received the highest blessing of God as the result of His great struggle. He is now supremely exalted, and is declared to be the Prince of the kings of the earth. He has sat down with the Father in His Throne.

We also, the followers of Jesus, bear the name of Israel. We, like Him, if faithful as was He, shall be exalted by the Father. We shall share with our Lord and Head His Throne. We shall be made higher than angels, principalities and powers, as our Master has been. How glorious this thought! How wonderful! Should not this great hope inspire us to the utmost diligence and carefulness that we may make our calling and election sure?

If we prove faithful unto death, the name Victor, or "Mighty with God," will be our name. It will apply to every one of the Lord's faithful ones as it applied to our Head. But only those who manifest His Spirit, only those who so love God that they will hold on to His promise and who will not let Him go without the blessing, will receive the fulfilment of the promise and will reign with Christ in glory and share His Throne.

Jacob had a method of marking the special manifestations of Divine providence – as when he called the place in which he wrestled with the angel *Peniel* – "*the face of God.*" This was a reminder to him that there he had been privileged to receive from the Lord a particular blessing, a marked answer to prayer. Similarly it is profitable to Spiritual Israel that we should make note in some special manner of the Lord's mercies and providences to us. Many feel poor as respects the favor and blessing of the Lord, simply because they have failed to let these blessings make a proper

impression upon their hearts at the time they were received. We are all leaky vessels, and unless special notation of these favors of the Lord are made upon the tablets of memory, or in some other way, their lesson and the encouragement and strength which they bring are largely lost to us.

Doubtless we should all have more "Bethels" and more "Peniels" did we but follow the course of setting up some kind of monuments of our Father's faithfulness in His answers to our prayers, and there entering into some covenant or vow with the Lord in return for these His mercies. As each watches for fresh evidence daily of the love and special watch-care of our God over us, we shall find that we have far more cause for encouragement and thanksgiving than we would be aware of without such notation and watchfulness. Let each of us, then, daily, weekly and yearly raise to God our "Ebenezers," if we would increase our faith and joy and love.

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