

PRAYING ALWAYS

SERMON by Mr F L GOSDEN

preached on Friday evening, Oct. 2nd 1959 at Galeed Chapel, Brighton.

Text: Ephesians 6 v. 18-9

Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints; and for me, that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the gospel.

You may perhaps remember that we concluded Lord's Day evening by saying a few things about the 18th verse: "Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit." Prayer is the most vital part of religion. It is the vital test of our religion. Indeed, every part of experience - all exercise of soul, whatever is used to exercise us - has in it the nature of prayer. The object of prayer is God in Christ. God *in* Christ, because God is a consuming fire, and *out* of Christ cannot be an object of worship.

The ground for prayer is the relationship and union that subsists between the Lord Jesus and His people. This is spoken of in David, for the encouragement of those who evidently were ready to halt: "I am the Lord thy God, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt; open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it" (Ps. 81 v. 10). If by the Spirit we had those first words spoken into our hearts, it would indeed open our mouths wide: "I am the Lord thy God." Everything is there. And there may be some people seen here to whom that is attractive. The same truth is expressed by Zephaniah: "The Lord thy God in the midst of thee is mighty; He will save, He will rejoice over thee with joy ... He will joy over thee with singing" (Zeph. 3 v. 17). And there is this relationship which was entered into and formed in the covenant of grace. And the covenant purposes of God enter into the whole of salvation. In consequence of those purposes, which flow from the everlasting love of God, is *all* gracious experience.

"Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit." Praying *always* - under all conditions. Mr Hart, in that wonderful hymn, you remember, encourages a disconsolate soul who says,

"What when prayer meets no regard?
Still repeat it often."

(J Hart; Gadsby's Sel. 781)

Difficult it is, when it appears that God takes no notice of us. But here we are exhorted to pray always, with respect to all things. We cannot take to the Lord things too small or things too great. In much mercy and compassion, He has condescended to His people to tell them "The very hairs of your head are all numbered," and "ye are of more value than many sparrows" (Mat. 10 v. 30-1; Lk 12 v. 7). He gives them to realise that His interest in them, and His preservation of them, is as minute and particular as the very hairs of their head, and his watchfulness over the sparrow, that it falls not to the ground without your Father's notice;¹ and therefore there is nothing in our lives that perplexes us, whether apparently small or overwhelmingly great, but we should "pray always with all prayer." If we are taught of God, and as we realise what we are, and the wilderness through which we are passing,

¹ "One of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father" (Mat. 10 v. 29).

there will be much matter for prayer. Prayer is to come to a full Christ - an *empty* sinner to a *full* Christ - for everything that we can need. That is prayer.

Supplication is to bring to Him those things which perplex us and threaten us, enemies that will overwhelm us, troubles that seem as if they take the very life out of life, and the very light out of light – consuming troubles, desolating sorrows, and fears. To bring them with urgency to the Lord is to make supplication to Him. And you will be conscious of both these exercises in your soul. I thought when we were singing the first hymn, the need there is for prayer, as we feel the deep wounds that sin has made.

“Where shall a sinner find a cure?
In vain, alas, is nature’s aid;
The work exceeds all nature’s power.”

It is a great thing to know that in experience; and if we know it, the same blessed Spirit who teaches us that will sooner or later lead us to this blessed, this great, Physician.

“There is a great Physician near;
Look up, O fainting soul, and live:
See, in his heavenly smiles appear
Such ease as nature cannot give.”

And you will feel the warmth of it; and there is prayer in it. Sometimes you will pray as you sing this hymn, and the hymns will pray for you in your heart. Sometimes the Scripture will be a prayer-book to you, and especially the Psalms. So it has rightly been said, “The Psalms are as the lungs of the Bible in the experience of a poor sinner.”

“See, in the Saviour’s precious blood,
Life, health, and bliss abundant flow!
’Tis only this dear sacred flood
Can ease thy pain and heal thy woe.” (A Steele; Gadsby’s Sel. 977)

Did you feel it with a living feeling? Did it set before you as you sang it that great High Priest? Did you see Him opening the fountain, His precious blood, upon Calvary?

“Praying always.” Oh, when the blessed Spirit enlarges the heart, and enables you to pour out your heart before Him, it will make conviction of sin a blessing! Some of you may know what I mean when I say that some enlargement of heart has issued upon conviction of sin, when the blessed Spirit has set before you the all-sufficiency of the Person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

“Praying always with all prayer” – and this is instructive; it may be a corrective to some of us. It is very painful to hear anybody pray as though God was such an one as ourselves – not intentionally, but almost as though you leave the Lord better informed when you finish prayer than before you commence. That is not prayer. But what will bring us to real “all prayer”? It will be the exercise of our souls, and the exercise of faith, as the Lord leads us through the wilderness into fiery temptations and overwhelming sorrows, exercises us with soul desertion and darkness, sounds an alarm through our souls by His solemn silence, or brings united trials to meet upon us - brings us into adversity. And then, my friends, it is “all prayer.” Though it may be ejaculatory prayer, some of the most sincere and prevailing prayers have been ejaculations out of a troubled heart in extremity.

“Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit.” This we cannot command; we cannot command the Spirit. What are we to do then, when we cannot feel the Spirit, and cannot

command Him? Should we cease to pray until we can? No, in no wise. It is "Pray *always*." If your heart is hard, pray with a hard heart. If you are dark as midnight, pray in midnight, as did Paul and Silas: "At midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises" (Acts 16 v. 25). Pray as did David when he was overwhelmed. His faith felt about in the midst of his overwhelmings: "Lead me to the Rock that is higher than I" (Ps. 61 v. 2). If we think we shall wait till we are more fit to pray, more spiritual, in a better condition, that is a legal spirit; we are attempting to bring something to God. The most difficult thing for proud nature is to be nothing, and to come with nothing; and nothing *is* nothing. Oh, we shall ever be learning the truth of Toplady:

"Nothing in my hand I bring"; (Gadsby's Sel. 143)

and we have to come into the pulpit in the same condition. There is a Scripture that has been very solemn to me relative to preaching: "Wherefore is there a price in the hand of a fool to get wisdom, seeing he hath no heart for it?" (Prov. 17 v. 16) The Lord will not accept the price of a fool that has no heart in worship. But oh, even if you cannot feel the influence of the Holy Spirit in prayer, there is a Scripture that will give you prayer in such a condition: "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?" (Lk. 11 v. 13). But we must *urge* our case. The hymn says "Urge thy claim"; I have to alter it; I feel I have got no claim, but –

"Urge thy *case* through all unfitness;
Sue it out, spurning doubt;
The Holy Ghost thy witness." (J Hart; Gadsby's Sel. 484)

"Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit." Well, you know where you are externally in your circumstances and pathway, in your condition, and in your soul, and therefore here is instruction: "praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance." It means that the Lord waits to answer prayer; He waits to be gracious, and He waits in profit to discipline us. The Lord does not give us what we ask for immediately. Why should He? Look at our unfaithfulness often, how we make Him to serve with our sins! How often His most blessed things are a weariness to us! And are we exempt from that charge, "My people have committed two evils; they have forsaken Me the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water" (Jer. 2 v. 13)? And should we expect the Lord immediately to grant our requests? He *waits* to be gracious.² And in that waiting time there is chastening. Perhaps there is not a more blessed example of the Lord waiting to be gracious, than as we have it in the type of Joseph and his brethren. Joseph could have satisfied their needs and sent them home immediately the first time they went to him if he thought proper. He knew who they were; he knew the famine that was in the land; but he spoke roughly to them, told them they were spies, did everything to discourage them, and brought them into great fear, and sent them back again. He did give them some provisions, but oh, when they found the cup and their money in the mouth of the sack! Ah, my friends, as Joseph waited to be gracious, so the Lord waits to answer prayer. And it is noticeable that everything that Joseph said to his brethren, and everything that he required of them, *compelled* them to come back. He knew that, and so, when the Lord is waiting to be gracious to us, He may treat us roughly. Things may get even worse than better – promises contradicted,

² "Therefore will the Lord wait, that He may be gracious unto you" (Is. 30 v. 18).

apparently, circumstances seeming to go against everything that we hoped for, and yet overruled to compel us to come back again to God. A mercy if it is so in our experience!

“Praying always, with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and *watching* thereunto with all *perseverance*.” That means that there will be something to endure. “Watching” and “persevering” – these two words make some of us exceedingly ashamed and full of fear. We often test our own religion by the word of God, and it is safe. We may go along very pleased with ourselves, but sometimes there is a simple word, or a simple question, that will bring us great searching of heart. And you look at these two words – watching with perseverance. Of course, where it is so, there will have been a case to open, a case as it was with Jacob. It was life or death with him, and as this armour commences with showing the wrestler, we shall have something to wrestle against, and in that wrestling there will be all prayer and supplications, and there will be sufficient urgency in the case to watch. How long is it since we prayed and watched with all perseverance? My friends, it does us good for the word to penetrate and search our hearts. I know it may reduce us, and perhaps reduce us to our proper dimensions. You remember we concluded last Lord’s Day evening by showing how short some of these prayers are. In public, it is required of us to express the feelings of the people and their cases, but you may depend upon it, where there is a real burden, and anxiety, and conflict, and exercise, our prayers before God will be shorter.

“Praying always ... with all perseverance and supplication *for all saints*.” This is for the whole church of God. We can in a general way pray for all men, pray for the nation, ungodly as it is; but to pray with all perseverance and supplication for all saints has in it the love of God. For if we love God, we love them also that are begotten of Him. And one very blessed sign of divine life is “We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren” (1 John 3 v. 14). Oh, I do desire for myself and for you that we may be exercised more and more with bowels of compassion toward the dear saints of God, the excellent of the earth. Most of them are oppressed in this evil day, this day when it is difficult to buy or sell without the mark of the beast. And there are a few people, a remnant, whom the Lord finds in a desert land, in a waste howling wilderness, and He leads them about. And how good it is to meet with one of those pilgrims - and you will feel their afflictions to be yours. You will “rejoice,” as we were reading just now, “with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep” (Rom. 12 v. 15). Do you sometimes in your secret prayers find your heart and mind going round, visiting as it were, those of His dear people in trouble, in affliction, in hospitals and institutions?

“With all perseverance and supplications for all saints.” Oh, there will be a special feeling of love where there is union, where you feel the grace of God; you can feel it; you can see it. Barnabas, when he went down to Antioch, was glad when he saw the grace of God.³ But oh to see the effect of it in a chastened, humbled, tender child of God, bowed down with sorrow and trouble, in the midst of difficulties! You pray for them, and in praying for such often the Lord will grant a blessing in your own soul. This is what Paul meant when he exhorted the Philippians “that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment; that ye may approve things that are excellent, that ye may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ” (Phil. 1 v. 9-10). I believe that it is very edifying and enriching, and one evidence of the love of God shed abroad in the heart, where there is that flowing together to the goodness of the Lord.

“And for me, that utterance may be given unto me.” Well, this is Paul, an eminent minister of the Gospel, endued with a message of grace perhaps beyond any of the Apostles, he who wrote that rich profound epistle to the Hebrews, as well as this to the Ephesians. Such a man desiring that they

³ “They sent forth Barnabas, that he should go as far as Antioch. Who, when he came, and had seen the grace of God, was glad” (Acts 16 v. 22-3).

would pray for him, that utterance may be given unto him! How much more then has such a one as myself need to seek that you might pray for me, that utterance may be given unto me! It is really a prayer for the ministry. Paul asks for this. He did to the Thessalonians: "Brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord might have free course, and be glorified" (2 Thes. 3 v. 1). There is a great deal in this request of Paul. It does not only intend that they should pray for him personally, but to pray that the ministry might be made profitable and fruitful in their own experience. There must be an intimate connection between those that preach and those that hear; and if you pray for the ministry, you pray for yourself, "that the Word of God may have free course," that it may not be hindered in its course. It can be hindered. And we need to pray about this. The apostle said to the Corinthians, "And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal" (1 Cor. 3 v. 1), because they were babes in Christ. There was a party spirit among them; their carnality had weakened them; there was not that spirituality of mind and exercise of soul. He could have spoken to them as spiritual so far as he was concerned, but it is solemn when the condition of the people puts a man in bondage in the pulpit. Now this is in the text: "and for me, that utterance may be given unto me, that the word of God may have free course." And that would be to pray for the assembly of the saints where the Gospel is preached, to seek that there may be nothing in our spirit that would hinder the Gospel. Oh, how good it is to be sanctified and made meet, a vessel of honour meet for the Master's use, whether it is used for preaching the Gospel or in a private capacity! It is very sweet to find that liberty, and this is one way to it: "Brethren, pray for us." If you desire spiritual food and benefit, and to be led into green pastures and beside the still waters, pray for us. You will get the benefit of it; and I cannot but believe there is a praying people here.

"That utterance may be given unto me." Oh, I have been fearful about this - an exercise that perhaps you do not know in the same way. David prayed this: "Take not the word of truth utterly out of my mouth" (Ps. 119 v. 43). David had his mouth stopped; his guilt stopped it. And yet, although in secret his mouth was stopped, evidently publicly he opened it in confession and prayer, and prayed with all prayer and supplication of the Spirit, right through the 51st Psalm; and in that Psalm he comes to the same point - "and for me, that utterance may be given unto me:" "O Lord, open thou my lips, and my mouth shall show forth Thy praise" (Ps. 51 v. 15). Oh, guilt will close it; it will indeed! And sometimes sorrow will close it, as again said David: "I was dumb, I opened not my mouth, because Thou didst it" (Ps. 39 v. 9). Well, we come into the pulpit under all these exercises, and trials, and conflicts; and therefore we do need your prayers, according to the direction "praying always with all prayer ... and watching thereunto." If you really pray before coming to the services, if you are hungry and thirsty, and pursued, as the children of Israel by Pharaoh and his hosts, and you come here as fleeing to a city of refuge, and pray that the Lord would give me a door of utterance, that He might "open my mouth boldly," you *would* watch. Perhaps some of you have had a secret case, and you have prayed before a service, and asked the Lord to give you some sign of His favour, that he would lead the minister in such a way as would meet your case; and as the service moves on you watch to see if anything is done, and if the Lord meets that case and answers that prayer, what a confirmation it is!

"... and for me, that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly" - not presumptuously, but boldly; and the boldness would be through faith, and what faith sees in Christ in the provision that He has made in the Gospel, that He has made in Zion; and when you get an inkling of it, it gives you a boldness. When you see that Christ is the Friend of sinners, the Saviour of the lost, when you perceive in the Gospel that He is a Conqueror, that He has got the victory, that He is exalted in heaven to intercede for His people there, that His precious blood can never lose its power, it will give you boldness in prayer, and you will watch for an answer. Job said "I would know what He would

answer me," as though he would watch for it. He knew not where to find Him, but oh, if I can but get to His seat, I will "fill my mouth with arguments."⁴ That is the boldness. He knows what arguments I would take, and they would be connected with your particular case. With respect to your soul, you would argue upon the ground of His finished work, an accomplished salvation, a finished redemption.

"And for me, that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly," or, as the Lord said by David, "Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it." To see one coming with his lips just apart, barely open, is nauseous to the Lord. Do you ever go to the throne of grace and feel that you need nothing, and that you know everything, and that you have got everything, and there is nothing really you want, but you feel it is a right thing just to pray? How different that is from the text! Ah, if the Lord, by His Spirit, should say in your heart "I am the Lord thy God, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt!" A wonder that was! Pharaoh looked on the people and said, "They are entangled in the land; the wilderness hath shut them in;" they will never get away from us' (Ex. 14 v. 3), and got his chariots together and pursued them. You may know that in your experience. What did it do? It caused the people to cry unto the Lord, and He said "I ... have heard their cry ... and I am come down to deliver them" (Ex. 3 v. 7-8). Oh my friends, the urgent cry of His people in their necessities does cause Him to come down and deliver them.

"... and for me ... that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the Gospel." When the Lord Jesus had declared unto them the parable of the sower, He said to His disciples, "Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God, but to others in parables" (Lk 8 v. 10). The preaching of the Gospel is to some just a parable. To others it is a blessed mystery, a secret which is revealed in their hearts, and applied to their own case.

"To speak boldly the mystery of the Gospel." It is a blessed mystery, and the mystery of the mystery is the incarnation of the Lord Jesus Christ. Every mystery in Him is made plain. All blessings are contained in Him, all merit, all life, all grace, all love, all power; and when you see it and realise the opposite in yourself, you will pray always with all prayer. Yes, "not by works of righteousness that we have done" (Tit. 3 v. 5). Oh may the Lord teach us how to pray!

⁴ "Oh that I knew where I might find Him! That I might come even to His seat! I would ... fill my mouth with arguments. I would know the words which He would answer me" (Job 23 v. 3-5)