

"Behold His patience lengthened out,

As those who fear Him...

Evening Lesson. Luke 18. vv. 1-34.

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TEXT ROMANS 12 V 12

We have now by divine grace on this holy Day reached the third clause

in this beautiful Scripture. It is a divine exhortation which forms the Lord's prescription for His believing people as they journey through the wilderness to the Land of Promise and know what it is to pass through the great tribulation that precedes their abundant entrance into the everlasting Kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. So as we may be mercifully and divinely helped, let us concentrate on the third clause. "Continuing instant in prayer."

Let us take first the sacred, inspired terminology, "continuing." and it will be obvious to those who fear God that the Lord has many methods and a wonderful variety of times as to when He will answer inspired prayer. There are those comparatively rare occasions when, "before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear." You get an immediate response; that is, before you begin to pray. I well know myself, and I have said when something of tremendous urgency has been laid on my heart, before I have got on my knees and the words began to flow out of my needy soul, the Lord has responded. It is an amazing experience. I believe we may say from all levels and in all periods of life, if there is a rule in method, the Lord's dear people often get their petitions answered when young fairly soon. The older you are, and the deeper your path, you will prove you pray hard and for a long time before you get an answer. This is where the exhortation is of tremendous importance; "continuing instant in prayer."

I refer to prayer as it begins by divine grace in the souls of dear children. I remember praying hard at school concerning all the term exams; running a race; spiteful boys; everything you could name and getting wonderful answers. Praying to God to help in examinations on to my late teens or twenties, and it is wonderful how the Lord answers. I think of my experience at Chelsea, and important exams. They said; "You are a dark horse. Look at the notice board." It was Physiology. I had pleaded before the Lord for this important examination. When the day came amazing strength and help was given, and my name was at the top of the list. I gave God all the glory. And there are those difficult and spiteful boys and girls, and a child prays. And a child is guilty. He has been deceitful and it rests with a great weight on the mind, and he prays for forgiveness. So how wonderful to get a praying girl or boy, and the Lord gives

quibk responses. You think it is a blessed path to tread, and that it will be the same all through life. As I have already mentioned, it is as though you go from period to period and God leads you in deeper paths, and you pray long and hard to get favours. Am I speaking the truth?

I will take you up on this point. Are there specific matters of peculiar importance which have filled your petitions now for a few years? Has the Lord answered you? You will say; "I am still waiting, watching, relying on the veracity of the words from His lips; on His faithfulness and immutability." You see the importance of the exhortation. In this matter of prayer for a specific blessing, deliverances and favours,- you may pray the Lord will so bless you that you with sheer delight may follow Him into the waters of baptism: you may be much in prayer concerning your dear children and grandchildren, and a wide range of subjects the Lord places on your heart. The answer has not yet come. So this is a wonderful exhortation. "continuing instant in prayer." In so far as breath divine is given to any soul, those prayers can never be in vain. They have ascended and they are perfumed by the Mediator in His infinite merit and received into the hand of God. They are not lost; they are treasured in heaven. At the time appointed by divine decrees of God those prayers will be answered.

It is obvious with the exhortation in the Text there is an inference. You will have tremendous opposition and much discouragement and temptation that would close the mouth of prayer. That is why you are exhorted to continue instant in prayer. O the opposition! the terrible temptations! the atheistic thoughts! the terrible infidelity of the fallen nature of man! It will suggest that God does not regard you. Is there a God? - everything to discourage your minds. With the things you see and hear, and the state of your soul you feel well nigh prayerless. I have often thought over the past few years of Mr Jabez Field. He said to me in his last few days; "I feel too weary to be exercised or to pray. Though there are groans and tears you come to the place where you feel so weary. Can you continue to pray? Another facet is, you feel sick and tired of your prayers; of your expressions; of the sound of your voice, and you are tempted that the Lord is weary of listening to you. There is much discouragement: the more you pray the worse things are, and the further off it goes. It seems to recede.

I am not here to discourage you, but to deliver the divine prescription. He says; "continuing instant in prayer." You find yourself in agreement with this. The Lord has only given His people one weapon,- prayer. You have nothing else. How will you get through your difficulties, find deliverance, get pardon and peace? How will you get through life? how will you get your body healed? My friends, He has given you the instrument of prayer. It is also a weapon which Satan does not like. He does not mind a tremendous arsenal, weapons, fighting men, a vast submarine fleet. What he does not like is prayer. It is a weapon that always defeats him. This is thing the people of God are learning all the time. If they try to do without prayer there is shame and confusion around them. They ask no questions: they did it on their own. Say you have any matter of disharmony or difficulty. If you try to resolve it you will exacerbate it. There is only one course, to put it in the hands of the Advocate. Never try to manage your own affairs. On a human level the Lord will bless the talents He has given you, as you pray for strength and help. Try to commit everything to the blessed hands of the Advocate. See if the Lord appears.

"Continuing instant in prayer." It is the same in reference to the healing of the body. Many forms of treatment and therapies are unavailing, and the Lord helps you to pray for the physician. It is wonderful how the Lord can give wisdom and direct the mind to a specific that will cure you. It is prayer. The Lord at the Throne of Grace can tell you the name of a specific. He can reveal to you what it is that will raise your body from a sickly state to a state of health. I have known for the Lord to name to me, as the great heavenly Apothecary, that which He has in the wells of Creation for the healing of a malady. It is amazing.

If we took it from one aspect, the Lord is telling you the only way to live is to pray. The only way that is God-honouring and soul-comforting is to live by prayer: it does not matter what it is. I have told you recently how Mr Popham invited ministers to his study, and by his chair he would say; "Gentlemen, this is the secret." Probably it was Mr Phillpot's chair. This is it. Take your business. Do you think it will flourish without prayer? You may have talents and you try to use them. Can you say; "I am independant now. I am skilled in my work. I do not need to ask the Lord to help me."? You are bound to come to miserable failure. You have

to pray every time. You can never say you have reached a point of proficiency and you do not need the Lord's help. The further you go the more you recognise your need of it. So live by prayer. You may be in a humble way in life, or in an important position: there is only one way to live,- by prayer. Very beautiful. If you are on the bridge of a vessel you need prayer. Take a job, and pray about it: see the issue. If there is no prayer, see the result!

So this is a preface to the last clause. This is what the Lord is saying to us; "continuing instant in prayer." There is nothing else for us. Take advisers and consultants: - the Lord uses means, but if we look to man it is a failure. What is true of an individual, a son or daughter of the most high God, is true of two or three, or a family. Nothing could be more blessed than a little household, as Martha, Mary, and Lazarus. What a trio! The Lord loved them. What a place for prayer! Three praying together: all pulling in the same direction. I would say in gratitude to God, you know many godly men or sons have back home one who is very much a part of the great secret of success and strength because the dear one,- a wife, mother, or sister is praying for you. "Her children arise up, and call her blessed." You go off and face the stern realities of life, and there is one on her knees for you. Very blessed.

So the word is prayer. It is the only instrument; the only weapon. You could not have anything more determined and dreadful than the angry power of hell, asserting themselves through media,- foes, friends, the same flesh, and Satan asserting his malignant envy and power. It is terrible. There is only one weapon; that is prayer. Thinking of this weapon in relation to the powers of darkness, we have in the beautiful hymn;

"And Satan trembles when he sees
The weakest saint upon his knees." (394)

The imprecatory prayers of David I regard in that light, when he calls down destruction on his enemies. So prayer is your instrument and weapon.

A few further words on these two words; "continuing instant." Why do you continue? Because you want answers and blessings and deliverances, so it is a matter of continuing. Will you give up as a defeatist? You can't give up, if your natural mind told you. You will never give up so long as the breath of life is in you. What will it mean? Persevering. I love

perseverance. It means just when everything is all so against you, and you feel unequal, unable to try to get up, and you rely on the Lord and go forward. It is a marvellous thing. You keep trying, if even if you have not much breath or life left; you go on. There was a Doctor of Divinity who was so afflicted with his lungs and in a dying state. He would have his bedroom window open and he preached to his last breath. This is it. Keep pressing on.

So "continuing instant in prayer." - perseverance, endurance. You endure all things. Christ endured the cross. Blessed it is to endure. Whatever there is against you - formidable, belligerent, that seeks to overthrow or distress you, still go on, as in your hymn;

"Jesus Christ, your Father's Son,
Bids you undismayed go on." (267)

You make very little progress, but you still go on. Perseverance and endurance is in the context of the strength of faith, and in what we had in the verse; "Rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation." So in the context of rejoicing in hope and in submission God gives you to His divine will, - "patient in tribulation" - you persevere and endure in the strength of faith, hope, and love. This is a bright, beautiful subject; the glory of it irradiated my spirit. Our blessed Lord knew the secret. It is difficult to associate prayer with One who is the Son of God. We must consider His humanity. The Man Christ Jesus was upheld by His divine Father. He prayed "with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death." He spent nights on the mountain top. He knew the secret: He knew the strength He needed for Gethsemane and Calvary. Do you know the strength you need to prevail? It will be your wisdom to spend nights on the mountain top.

"Instant" is self-explanatory. It is a matter of urgency. The whole matter is so urgent, vital, instant: there must be no delay; no denial. If I take this further, I could show you the word 'instant' is a word of penetration. That is to say, the Lord will give you faith that penetrates the clouds, the temptations and fears, and reaches His Throne. In the word 'instant' you have all the elements of victory; of overcoming, conquering, prevailing: all the basic elements of it are in these words; "continuing instant in prayer." You will understand by the time I say

Amen this will only be as a drop from the ocean.

I want to speak to you on prayer itself. I have two things in mind. It is incredible to us according to our limited capacity as to how great strength there is in the effectual, fervent prayer of one righteous man. "Elijah, 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," - one man. I get an inkling of it, - no more; and I would express it to you in this way. I get an inkling of what a tremendous opportunity a Prayer Meeting is. If you think of the value of the prayer of one, and you think of the prayers of a number together under the same powerful influence, there is nothing impossible, if it is the will of God. What an opportunity! You go to the Throne of Grace, and see something of what is before you. Think of the Church of God under the special influence of the Spirit, as when Peter was in prison, "but prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him." There it is. There were sixteen soldiers to hold and guard him; chains, the ward, the iron gates to incarcerate him. "But prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him." "Continuing instant in prayer." I have heard of gracious people who have a special subject on their hearts and have met together to plead with the Lord concerning the matter. I have also known for friends at ~~the~~ Prayer Meeting before the morning service to pray to the Lord to heal our dear son, and with what success were those petitions owned! It is a wonderful thing if you have got a special matter of priority, for several bound together at the Throne of Grace to pray. I feel sensitive to the feelings of some of your hearts in this way. You do not realise when I stand and preach the gospel I am impressed by the Spirit that certain friends need special prayer. I can sense it to night and have done all through the day. It will be unsaid yet understood. It is wonderful. You do not come to me to put your case in front of me. The Lord has shown me, and made it a matter in my spirit that He would grant special prayer for you. This is a spiritual communication between hearts.

"Continuing instant in prayer." Prayer is a divine ordinance: I will name some of the principles. Prayer is breath divine. It is the very breath of the Spirit in your soul. You have two Intercessors: the

internal intercession of the Holy Ghost, and Christ in the third heavens. How does the Holy Spirit intercede for you? By inspiring your prayers, and this is in perfect correspondence with the intercession of Christ at the right hand of God. Do you feel inspired? You say; "This is not me speaking; it is the Spirit in me." Did not the Lord say to those who were persecuted; "Whatsoever shall be given you in that hour, that speak ye: for it is not ye that speak, but the Holy Ghost."?

What are the principles of prayer? A recognition of the glorious, infinite, supreme, majestic Being of God, and we His creatures and His children by adopting grace are wholly dependant on Him. You know it, and in a deepening sense. What will do? He has a vast reservoir of power, grace, strength, love and mercy, and you are dependant. What will you do? Pray by the Spirit. There is nothing else. You need all-prayer. Seek Him, plead with Him. "Having therefore obtained help of God," There is this to be obtained. "Who through faith...obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of the fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens." You obtain. So this is the blessed ordinance of prayer.

Another principle is, the Holy Ghost, the Person of the Holy Ghost is responsible for prayer in every believing soul. He indites. It is under His powerful, gracious, blessed, benign influence you pray. There is no prayer without. He is in you the Spirit of grace and supplications. Very wonderful.

Thirdly, and this takes us back to Thursday, faith in the Mediator, the ascended Redeemer. You cannot go to God immediately. You cannot go to the Holy Father immediately. He is the Object of prayer, but you only go through the Mediator. There is no direct approach. So, faith in the Mediator and His mediation; and the Father is propitious to you because He has been propitiated by the sacrifice of His only Son incarnate. Faith in His mediation is a great principle of prayer. See how you go to the Father; how the Holy Ghost leads you. Never make an attempt only in His worthy Name. Plead His blood, merit, sacrifice.

Another principle is, the Holy Spirit teaches the people of God to pray in harmony and submission to the holy, inscrutable will of God. So I

present to you the divine prescription; "Continuing instant in prayer." The whole force and inference is, you will get the blessing, obtain deliverance and the favour you desire at His hand, therefore continue instant in prayer.

And see the beauty of the holy trio; "Rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; continuing instant in prayer." It is His will that you rejoice in hope. Satan tries to contract us: fear does. It is as though the Lord says to His people; "Here is room for your soul to expand; to rejoice in hope. Why should you be robbed at every turn?"

"Why should the children of a King
Go mourning all their days?" (24)

Blessed be God. Amen.