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Prayer Meeting address by Mr. J. Delves at "Ebenezer" Clapham on  
Monday, 19.9.60

Hymns: 1051, 382

Reading: Acts 12 (1-19) 1 Thessalonians 5 (14-28)

One of the mysteries and mercies that we may feel is that God is an approachable Being. We can, in some ways, understand that those attributes that pertain to Him are necessary to His Godhead; but when we contemplate His glorious Majesty and what He is, it does seem an amazing wonder that He should be approachable by creatures, and not only creatures, but guilty sinners. This is your mercy and mine, as we may have grace to realise it, and are helped to feel it.

The Scriptures give us many striking instances of prayer, undoubtedly for our encouragement and confirmation, all being for our learning; and here is one striking instance of the power of prayer which I would like to notice in one or two particulars; as, first of all, the apparently impossible conditions that prevailed when they made prayer for Peter. It is said here that he was "put in prison and delivered to four quaternions of soldiers to keep him"; so that a close and heavy guard was put over him to prevent any possibility, humanly speaking, of escape. How much of this the church realised we do not know, but this we do know, that under even these apparently impossible conditions, where naturally speaking one could hardly anticipate an answer, prayer was made for Peter. This may be helpful to us in some ways when certain matters lie heavily upon us, if they do; and especially where human reason would say it is to no purpose to attempt to pray about it, because it cannot alter the position. What a mercy it is when faith is brought into exercise so that it can look above what appear to be impossibilities and plead with God.

Another point consists in the fervency and continuity of their prayer. They did not just say a prayer and then practically forget about it; but they were evidently gathered

together for this particular purpose, in which they continued with evident importunity, fervency and earnestness. To a point indeed prayer is not prayer unless faith is in exercise in some measure and the heart is engaged and one is enabled to approach God and so to continue in waiting upon Him, following the exhortation in the Thessalonians to "pray without ceasing".

Another point is the remarkable deliverance that was given. Nothing less than a divine interposition could have affected the case; but here we have to see that with God nothing is impossible. Although he was "bound with two chains and the keepers were before the door keeping the prison", yet in answer to their prayers evidently "the angel of the Lord came upon him and smote him on his side saying, Arise up quickly, and his chains fell off from his hands and he went out". As we know, realising that it was the angel of the Lord he found his way to the house of Mary the mother of John, where many were gathered together praying.

Here indeed is a remarkable point. Although without question they had been praying for his deliverance, yet when it was given in answer they could not believe it; but Peter continued knocking and eventually the fact was proved that it was Peter. This may be some help to us in our own exercises, and, as we can view it, may confirm us in a continuing to wait upon God; especially in the light of His own promises where He has declared Himself to be a prayer-answering God. This can be a privilege and a mercy and sometimes a great relief especially under certain conditions when we are helped to take our matters to the Lord, lay them before Him, and, continue to seek unto Him. May the Lord help us in these things as they may concern us, and favour us this evening. Amen