

Sermon preached by Mr J K Popham
at Galeed Chapel, Brighton
on Sunday evening 7 July 1929

Luke 18 v 1

"And He spake a parable unto them to this end that
men ought always to pray, and not to faint"

That is the teaching of this parable, that men should always pray and not faint. Whatever the difficulties may be with which they are at times confronted, the parable says, go on praying. You pray to God, omnipotent, omniscient, kind, loving, wise and faithful. He has at His command heaven and earth, but He does not measure as we do. Time with us is important; the lapse of time may apparently again and again seem to us that it is too late. Some circumstances may seem to say to us that the thing is beyond hope, do not continue praying. But, says the Saviour, "Go on". The parable says that there was a judge, harsh, selfish, sordid, loving ease, and a poor widow comes to him and lays her case before him, but he takes no notice of it. But she, having a real case and needing that case to be attended to was not put off by this unjust judge's silence, so she presses the case; she urges it; comes to him day after day and says, "I have an adversary, will you take the case up". At last wearied by her perpetual visits, her persistence in the matter, he says, I do not fear God, I do not care for men, but the trouble this widow is giving me moves me to look into her case. That is the parable; the result of it is, the intention of it is, that God's people who cry night and day unto Him shall go on praying. Whatever appearances there may be against that exercise, continue in it. Nobody will say it is easy who has the exercise in their heart. Why should we go on praying? Why, because Christ says we should. That were enough, if He spoke nothing else. If He said men should pray always, I am the Lord, that were enough. The Lord's word is a great word, full of authority, full of wisdom, full of goodness, always kind. He says go on praying. This word may try some poor people; they may say, we cease to pray very often, so often that we wonder at times if we pray at all.

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Slackness in prayer often may beget questions in an honest conscience as to whether there is any real prayer. Still Christ says "Pray on, cease not". But I get no answers; He may be bearing long with you; He may be saying that He has always seen that you need more discipline, more emptying; that you need to be weakened more; that you need to lean less to your own understanding to which He sees you are very prone. Our time is always ready; His time often is not. Why should we pray, pray without ceasing? Because He is the great object, the great object of worship. He is a full Christ, an able, willing Saviour. He possesses all grace; His Father gave it to Him before the world began. He is full of compassion; He is an effectual intercessor; His intercession is always prevalent. He is too wise to err, too wise to let a poor fainting sinner utterly faint. He gives out a little strength; He puts in a 'Who can tell' occasionally. We ought always to pray, because of the Person to whom we pray. Think of Him; O sinner, think of Him. We should pray because it is an appointed means of becoming acquainted with God. We are not much acquainted with Him. The best saint here is not much acquainted with Him. But the more prayer there is, the more acquaintance with Him will come sooner or later. We are very familiar with self; a wretched thing, a wicked thing, but we are very familiar with self. O it were well for us to become more familiar with God. We should pray because He says come to the throne of grace, the mercy seat, and I will meet with thee there. O what a promise - I will meet with Thee there, the appointed place. There is a king, must be a king, where there is a throne. There is a fulness; all the fulness of the Godhead bodily dwells in Him. There is knowledge in Him, wisdom. "I wisdom dwell with prudence", and I have riches, durable riches and righteousness, and I fill the treasures of all who come to Me.

We should pray because there is an end; the end is an answer. No man ever prayed in the Holy Ghost and missed an answer. Many a saint has had to wait long for the answer, but no saint ever died without an answer to a prayer the Holy Ghost indited in his heart. We should always pray notwithstanding the

depressing, sinking, discouraging sense of the demerit of our nature and of our conduct. That demerit may be as a mountain before us sometimes, but faith in the Saviour will say in the heart of a sinner, there is infinite merit in the Person of Christ, infinite merit in the Person of Christ. Consider His Person; He is God; He is man; He is one Person, the infinitely blessed Son of God, and the blessed Son of Man in time and these two natures are united and they constitute in their union Emmanuel. In Jesus dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily; in Jesus is all the fulness of God's good pleasure, the goodwill of Him that dwelt in the bush. What a Person! And consider the infinite merit of His work on the cross, when He offered Himself without spot to God. Therefore,

Let not conscience make you linger,
Nor of fitness fondly dream.
All the fitness He requireth
Is to feel your need of Him
This He gives you
Tis the Spirit's rising beam

Prayer - what is it? Not a form of words; not an ability to speak before and among men in prayer. It is the fruit of the motion and teaching and inspiration and power of the Holy Ghost, and so a sigh, a sob, that never found utterance, reaches the ear of God, being winged and strengthened by the operation of the Holy Ghost. Do not be careful about your words, so careful as about your spirit in prayer. You are gifted perhaps to speak profitably among the saints in prayer, but prayer in the spirit, as Jude speaks, praying in the Holy Ghost, that is effectual.

What is prayer? It is the heart telling God what is needed, what the sinner feels to need. O it is a great thing to speak honestly when you are on your knees. It is a great thing to speak honestly when you are confessing your sins. Men may be very proud of saying some things about themselves, calling themselves bad names and all kinds of things, and may do so in a prayer meeting that they may be seen of men and they get their

reward. The publican's case is very instructive. He had not courage to talk; he had not strength to lift his eyes up to heaven; he had got a pain, a burden, and a sorrow; he had got guilt on his conscience. And so, smiting on his breast he said, perhaps audibly, perhaps not, "God be merciful to me a sinner". Prayer is laying a case before God with its aggravations. It is confessing the demerit of original sin as in our nature; it is adoring the infinite God; it is justifying Him in what He says against us; it is clearing Him when He speaks against us; it is admiring His glory; it is asking for bread and for water and for salvation. O it is a great thing to pray. One of the first words of commendation, if you so take it, that God uttered concerning Saul of Tarsus was this, "Behold he prayeth". A great word to us. How many in this congregation could look for the Lord Jesus to say such a word, "Behold he prayeth". He sees you behind the hedge, in your bedroom, in your office, wherever you are, and O, if He only can say that sinner prays; the Spirit is in him; who knows, who can express, how pleased the Lord is with men when they pray. There are definite things before sinners when they pray in the Holy Ghost and you have one of them in the Psalms, to which I would specially draw your attention. With the Lord there is forgiveness that He may be feared. One of the most encouraging things a sinner can get when seeking the face of God is to find that he believes he is capable of being saved. Who doubts that? says one. Well, God knows who believes it; God knows who believes it to his encouragement and strengthening. It is a great thing really to believe in the infinite merit of the Lord Jesus. I am disposed to repeat a word I said here last Friday at the Prayer Meeting. I remarked that some may feel and say that their convictions of sin are not sufficiently deep, and my remark was this - that it is good to feel more after union with Christ than to be bemoaning the lack of conviction of sin. I do not mean that it is not good to have conviction of sin, but it seems that it is a great thing and gives point and edge to prayer when a sinner has before him the blessing of union with the Lord Jesus, and when that union is realised it gives deeper conviction than anything else; it produces the sweetest contrition, the most evangelical repentance that men ever get in this world, and that object is before faith - "I in them" O to

be praying for that. If you carefully read the Scriptures, you will see that the Trinity dwells in sinners, the people of God. The Apostle Paul writes to the Corinthians that the Father should say to his people that He will receive them and walk in them and dwell in them. Is that before you? It is a great thing to be seeking the indwelling of God the Father. It is written concerning the Son in the prayer of the Apostle Paul - "That Christ might dwell in the saints". It is written to the Colossians - "Christ in you the hope of glory" is the mystery which God had hidden from ages and from generations. Is that before you, the coming of Christ into the soul? It is written - "Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Holy Ghost dwelleth in you". Take this dear friends, and see if you have ever had that mystery, that mercy set before you, the indwelling of the Trinity. "I in them", says the Saviour, "and Thou in Me". And when Philip, hearing that Christ was going to the Father, said to Christ, "Show us the Father and it sufficeth us" says Christ in answer "He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father also". And if you hold the Son, you have the Father. O, but I cannot reach that says one. I did not say you could, neither does the Scripture say so. But it does say this, that this blessing can come to you; that it is a matter of revelation, a matter of infinite stoop, a matter of kindness of the Holy Spirit in making known God, in glorifying Christ and coming to Himself. Prayer is concerned about this indwelling of the Trinity.

The difficulty of prayer is more or less distinct in the context. Here is a widow, and she is injured, and she seeks justice at the hand of him who ought to give it to her, but he delays; he is idle; he is sordid; he is selfish; he does not care about her at all; and all that he does when he arises is out of a selfish motive. There are difficulties; there is injustice, much trouble in the saints of God. I have mine; you have yours. Two enemies are always inflicting some injustice upon us; sin and the devil. Hart expresses it about sin -

Say to that ugly jailer, sin
Loose him and let him go

And perhaps you may say sometimes, Lord "I am held by the jailer of a worldly spirit" or one says, "a proud, obdurate heart holds me fast". Another says "I am carnal, sold under sin". And the ties of nature - says nature, bind him to the earth. And you are injured, hurt, wronged. Wronged? Yes, because, being a child of promise, a child of grace, a child of God, what has sin to do with you? O seek the redress that alone is in the heart and hand of Jesus Christ. And the devil, he is always seeking to hurt us, and wrong us; the god of this world. Now he thrusts in some infidel thought; now he sets some little bit of tinsel and dangles it before our silly eyes, and now he seeks to drive us from our knees, and again he seeks to discredit the Scriptures. Who can tell but the people who suffer so what it is to be afflicted in this way. And what is the remedy? Prayer, prayer. Covenant blessings are promised; they are promised to prayer. "For these things will I be enquired of by the House of Israel to do them for them".

Pray if thou canst or canst not speak;
But pray with faith in Jesus' Name.

Go on my friends, you may get rid of many troubles, of all these hurtful enemies that are always like a maul on your spirit, a bar in your way, a hindrance to your heart and conscience. These, more or less actively, powerfully, will be with you till you get to your dying bed and take your last breath. Pray always, and faint not. O what a mercy it is to be enabled to pray against this dreadful thing, called by Paul, the body of sin and death. "Who shall deliver me from this body of sin and death." It is called a body, to show the reality of it; of sin and death, to show the quality of it. Now, says Paul, when having prayed that prayer - "I thank God through Jesus Christ" He is my deliverer; in Him I hope. "I thank God" and thank Him for teaching me to make a distinction between sin in me and my living in sin; between sin in me and my being a servant of sin.

There is a distinction and Paul was instructed in it. Sin was in him like a corrupt dead body tied on his back, but it was not part of himself; it was not with his consent that it was there and so the distinction is sometimes opened by the Holy Spirit enabling the afflicted soul to say, "It is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me". Now he says "With my mind I, regenerated soul, Paul the Apostle, I, a true christian man, serve God. I serve Him in my thoughts and my prayers and my love. I cleave to Christ crucified and glory in none beside. With my mind I serve the law of God. Perhaps some of us rightly feel that we know very little of this. Well then, says Christ, "Pray, pray". And what about the persistent and insistent devil. O, says the Saviour, "I saw Satan as lightning fall from heaven" and I believe the same sight is reserved for every praying sinner. One day, God will bruise Satan under the feet of all his people. On an occasion Joshua called for all Israel and the captains of Israel and there were five kings captive before Joshua. And Joshua said to the captains "Come and put your feet on the necks of these kings". And the day is coming when Christ will say to His people "Put the foot of your faith on the neck of the devil". "God shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly". It is sure to come. You have it in Isaiah where we are told that God trod down and brought down to the ground even to the dust the lofty city. The lofty city, He layeth it low; He layeth it low even to the ground. And then what? "O" He says, "The foot shall tread it down, even the feet of the poor and the steps of the needy". Men should pray always. They ought to pray always and not to faint.

A few words respecting providential things. If we are led to manage our things on our knees we shall come off well. Many and many a soul has got great good out of temporal troubles. "Lord, in trouble have they visited Thee. They poured out a prayer when Thy chastening was upon them". He makes the greatest speed, gets on the best, who travels in such and such cases on his knees, so to express it. Take your cases, your troubles. He says, "The Lord shall avenge His own elect which cry day and night unto Him, though He bear long with them." You may have a trouble that God

has given you to carry and you are to carry it to your grave. Well, you may get deliverances in respect of that trouble, even grace to say respecting it, "Thy will be done". O many and many a time the Lord, who does not see fit to take some trouble away, says, "I will give you strength to bear it" We have this in the case of the Apostle himself, who with the thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet him, went thrice to the Lord to get that thorn removed. It was not a bit of a thorn such as we get, but a long, piercing thorn, sticking fast. And he got deliverance; he got distinct deliverance. Not by the extraction of the thorn, but by having grace to bear it. "My grace is sufficient for thee". "Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmity, that the power of Christ may rest upon me". O it is a great thing to get that. What trouble have you? You need not tie it on your coat sleeve and carry it about that everybody may see and read it. It is quite enough if you can take it to the Lord, though there are troubles which the people of God have which it is good for them to let their friends know about, that they may pray for them. When you have friends, do let them know if you are in trouble, if it is a proper thing to speak about, that they may, by God's help, pray for you. Paul said to his people "Brethren pray for us". We need to pray with respect to temporal troubles, either for deliverance, clean outgates from them, or submission to the will of God. This praying is to go on. It is not the labour for a day, but for the life. It is to continue. Pray without ceasing. It means the need wont cease; the burden wont be taken off; the concern wont die; the desire to know the Lord wont die; the desire to be united to Him more closely and have more fellowship with Him and to be receiving more grace from Him wont die. The desire to walk in Christ's word - "Grow in grace" wont die. And as long as the need continues, so will prayer continue. It is a necessity; it is an obligation; it is God's way. He has appointed it. He intends that His people shall come; He loves to see them at His throne and to hear them speak. "O My dove" says He, "that art in the clefts of the rock; let Me see thy countenance, let Me hear thy voice, for sweet is thy voice and thy countenance is comely." What an ugly, deformed, loathsome person was the Pharisee, when

he was strutting before the Lord as if he were somebody and had done something. What a beautiful creature was that sinful man who could not bear himself and had to cry with pain and grief and shame, smiting on his breast the while. "God be merciful to me a sinner."

Wait on Him. Some people boast of getting out of the seventh chapter of Romans into the eighth. It would be well for them to consider that when that part of the Scripture was written there was not an eighth chapter following the seventh chapter; it was one scroll. The distinction and division of the Scriptures into chapters does not mean a difference and a distinction in experience. The distinction and division of the Scriptures into chapters is modern and convenient, but the doctrine of the Scripture is one and the conflict in the seventh carries on into the eighth, for in the eighth chapter Paul says "If ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live," and mortifying the deeds of the body is killing them and that is a constant matter. And again in the eighth chapter he says - we groan, we are in trouble, we live in hope, we are saved by hope, but we are in trouble. Men ought always to pray. You will never get away from it if the Holy Ghost is in you. You will be at it all your days because you will have need as long as you live. Therefore, may the Lord help you and me with you to walk in this Scripture "Men ought always to pray and not to faint".

May the parable instruct us; may the Spirit of God bring the need of it into our heart and help us to wait on Him.

AMEN.