

Sermon preached by Mr. J. Raven at Shaw's Corner, Redhill on Tuesday  
Evening, February 3rd 1952

"Be careful for nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus". Philippians 4. vv 6 & 7

+++++

The Apostle has just written, "Rejoice in the Lord alway: and again I say, rejoice." In the book of Nehemiah we have the word, "The joy of the Lord is your strength". To rejoice in anything other than the Lord is weakness. If we are rejoicing in our own wisdom, our wisdom is utter folly: If we are rejoicing in our own strength, our strength is weakness; if we are rejoicing in our own supposed constancy, our ability for this, that or the other, we are foolish; if we are putting our trust in men and rejoicing in men, even great men, we are doomed to disappointment. "Cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the Lord". O, what is it that we are rejoicing in? It is a searching question.

Then the Apostle says, "Let your moderation be known unto all men". "Your moderation" - be sober in all things. Well, if we are enabled to rejoice in the Lord the things of time and sense will assume very small proportions. O, in the light of what He is, and in the light of eternity, what little, little things, what trivialities will the things of time and sense appear! "Let your moderation", in all things, "be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand". This word is true in all ages of the church's history, "The Lord is at hand". It is for the church of God in all ages of her history to be expecting the promised coming of the Lord, and to regard it as at the door. I think that each generation of the people of God may quite properly think of it as being at the door, because when death comes to a believer he immediately passes out of time into eternity. With the Lord a thousand years are as one day and one day is as a thousand years. Eternity differs so much from time. When a believer dies, entering in once upon eternity, he is faced with the fulfilment of the promise of the Lord's coming. These are matters difficult of comprehension; our minds are so contracted, our thought is so crippled, but it is well for us at any rate, to entertain the thought that the Lord is at hand, and it behoves us to be as servants who are waiting for their lord when he shall return from the wedding. O how it becomes servants in such a case to be faithful in the performance of their duty, and to be continually watching for the arrival of their lord, and so it is to be in the church of Christ, a constant expectancy, a waiting for the coming of the Lord, and in desire a hasting towards it, "Even so, come, Lord Jesus".

LIBRARY OF THE

GOSPEL STANDARD BAPTISTS

Then he says, "Be careful for nothing". These time things after all, are very trivial things, they are by no means the all-important things; the things of the soul are vastly more important than the things of the body. "Be careful for nothing", that is, be full of care for nothing, be full of unbelieving care for nothing. Well, how are the people of God to be careful for nothing? The Apostle tells us in the next word, "but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God". "In everything". If we were wise, how, instead of carrying the burden of the least of our daily cares ourselves, we should be casting them upon the Lord; but such is our hardness of heart, our foolishness, our unbelief, that we often carry things as if there were no throne of grace, as if there were no God to go to. "Be careful for nothing", be full of anxious care for nothing, turn anxiety into prayer. This reminds us of the request of the disciples when they said to the Lord, "Lord teach us to pray". How dependent we are upon the Lord for every breath of real prayer! Do you find you can always pray about things? I don't. There may be some necessity pressing very hard, there may be some difficulty very formidable, and yet no spirit of prayer about it. Prayer does not grow naturally in our hearts, and all true prayer is indited by the Holy Ghost, and

"Prayer indited by the Lord,  
The Lord will surely hear".

So we do need the Spirit of grace and supplication in order that we may "in everything", things great and things small, "in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let our requests be made known unto God".

"In everything". Sometimes we may be foolish enough to think that a thing is so small that we do not need to pray about it, but set about handling it ourselves, with our own strength and in our own wisdom. We make a great mistake. O how often the people of God are heavily weighted because they do attempt to carry these little things, these trifling things of their daily lives in their own strength without reference to the Lord, without seeking help from Him. They live most happily, and live nearest the Lord, who are enabled by His grace to pray about the matters of their daily lives continually.

"In everything". Sometimes we may see a thing to be so great, so formidable, to present such impossibilities, that it seems hopeless to pray about it; the thing cannot be altered, it is there, it is like a huge mountain, impassable. 'Useless to pray about that', says unbelief and a tempting devil, but the Apostle says, "in everything". You have often heard me repeat some lines I met with years ago, and they are very instructive; "Our small things are great things in God's love, and our

great things are small things in His power".

"But in everything". You may have people who are a continual cross to you, they may be a continual source of trial and annoyance to you, they may cross your path repeatedly and cause you a good deal of anguish and vexation, a good deal of mortification; you do not know how to endure them, they are so persistently troublesome, and possibly do all they can to annoy or entrap you, or tempt you in all kinds of ways. "In everything", "in everything by prayer and supplication". "In everything". The best thing you can do with these people is to bring them to the throne of grace and lay the matter before the Lord, to pray about them and to pray for them as well, as you may be helped. "In everything". He knows all about it; the Psalmist speaks of the wicked as being God's hand, "the wicked which is thy sword, .... men which are thy hand". When we are led to view things rightly, these people who behave so ill to us, whose unkindness causes us so much anguish of spirit, are after all but the hand of God. When Shimei was cursing David, David said, "Let him curse; for the Lord hath bidden him, .... the Lord hath said, Curse David". He saw the hand of God in it, and David was enabled to commit his cause unto the Lord.

"In everything by prayer and supplication". You may have before you two things and you must make your choice between them. Some people have had two situations before them and have not known which would be for the best, not known what to do. "In everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God". As this applies to the concerns of individual people of God, so it applies to the concerns of His cause, His church in the wilderness. You look at the cause of Christ. How often it has been in a low place, in a place of afflictions and impoverishment. How often it has seemed as if the light would go spark out, and those who fear God will be much exercised about it.

"To see thy saints in mourning clad,  
And foes by their distress made glad,  
O'erwhelms my soul with poignant grief;  
Lord, send thy servants sweet relief".

Well, these are matters in which we do well if we are helped to turn them into prayer; in everything, everything concerning the cause, everything concerning the church, everything concerning the ministry. All those who fear God will have their exercises about the ministry, and it will be so especially at times, that they will have to pray the Lord of the harvest that He would send forth labourers into His harvest. As they look around and see the lack of God-sent ministers, men who are the Lord's messengers in the Lord's message, O how that prayer will issue

from their hearts again and again, that the Lord would appear and send godly men, true ministers of Jesus Christ, to minister to the people and be His witnesses.

Then again, with regard to each one's personal case, if you are concerned about your own soul, you will be concerned about the ministry. You will want the Lord's servants to be as His mouth to you, you will be saying, 'Lord, speak through him to my soul, to my case, grant that I may not merely hear the voice of the minister, but that I may hear Thy voice speaking through him'. Do you ever have to pray in that way about the ministry, that it may be made to you a ministry of Jesus Christ, such a ministry as that you, one of the poor of the flock, shall know that it is the word of the Lord, will have the indubitable evidence in your soul that it is God's message and God's word spoken to you, applied with power to your heart? Well, the people of God will be constrained to pray about these things. It is good to pray about them; prayerless hearers, unexercised hearers are not likely to profit unless the Lord in His sovereign mercy meets with them and takes a dealing with them, puts prayer into their hitherto prayerless hearts.

"In everything". And you know, there is one thing that causes the people of God many anxious thoughts, many solemn thoughts, and that is the hour and article of death, and not only the hour and article of death, but the pains of death. There are some who are not merely exercised about the actual death of their body but exercised as to what pain or weariness may precede it, what they may have to suffer upon a bed of languishing, and whether their religion will stand them in good stead in the midst of Jordan's swelling. They long to be enabled by grace to endure what the Lord is pleased to lay upon them in humble submission to His will. Well, these things will be prayed about by the people of God, that they may be enabled in hours of suffering to sanctify Him, and that they may pass the river "telling the triumphs of their King", that they may die well.

"Be careful for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication". There appears here to be intended two degrees. There is prayer, and there is supplication. Supplication seems to indicate a more urgent form of prayer. Sometimes prayer flows out very gently, there is something placid about it. We read of some prayers in the Word of God where there is a sweet pouring out of the heart before God, and in that having communion with heaven; but then there are some prayers in the Scriptures that have more a note of urgency about them. For instance, when the Psalmist cries, "For Thy Name's sake, O Lord, pardon mine iniquity, for it is great", and when David poured out his soul in the 51st Psalm as

a most guilty sinner, there was a note of supplication in it. When Hezekiah in his affliction prayed unto the Lord His God there was a note of urgency in his petition, and we read of the Lord Jesus Christ that He "offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto Him that was able to save Him from death". And so there are those agonising prayers which issued from the Redeemer's heart in those solemn hours in Gethsemane and on the cross. There was a difference between those prayers and the prayers that He offered when He went up into the mountain to pray.

"Prayer and supplication with thanksgiving". O, it is comely to give praise to God and to offer to Him thanksgiving - there is something very sweet in the exercise. Is it not true that many of the people of God have found their sweetest moments when they have been enabled to pour out their hearts in blessing and praising the Lord, when their hearts have been in tune with the 103rd Psalm for instance, or when they have found their hearts' feelings expressed in those words we read in our lesson, "O that men would praise the Lord for His goodness and for His wonderful works to the children of men". Praise is comely, and it is most sweet to be enabled to give praise unto God. I have known what it is to have my heart suddenly touched with a sense of God's goodness to me, and O how gratitude and praise has flowed out spontaneously from my heart to Him, and there has been a sweetness in the experience that one has never been able to forget. But alas, alas, that such things should so seldom happen. One says,

"How oft I grumble and repine,  
With blessings in my hands".

John Bunyan tells us that among the abominations that he found in his heart was this, a forgetfulness to praise God for the mercies he received. But where there is prayer, it is meet to join with it thanksgiving. So the Apostle here says, "with thanksgiving". Can we say that there is ever a time when we have nothing to thank God for? Even in our lowest and most afflicted state have we not to say, "He hath not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities"? Have we not reason to thank God for that? And again, when Jeremiah was in a wretchedly desponding mood, he poured out his heart's misery in that third chapter of the Lamentations; suddenly there was a turn given to his thoughts and he began to say, "This I recall to my mind, therefore have I hope. It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is Thy faithfulness". He found he had matter to thank God for. Where he had seen nothing but misery now he could see nothing but the mercy and goodness of God.

So I say, however low our condition may be, there is much to thank God for. We have need to thank Him that we are not consumed, that things are not with us as we richly deserve them to be. And then, with all the afflictions and disappointments and crosses that we are the subject of, have we not experiences of His goodness? have we not tokens of his mindfullness of us? no tokens of His lovingkindness? Has He cut off every mercy from us? No, in our right minds we would confess that in the midst of all those things that seem to us so incommodious, there is on the other hand much mercy, much goodness of God, and although we may have our pains,

"Sweet pleasures mingle with the pains,  
While His left hand our head sustains".

"By prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God". "Let your requests be made known". Said the Lord Jesus, "Ask and it shall be given you, seek and ye shall find, knock and it shall be opened unto you". And the Lord said "I am the Lord thy God, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt: open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it". Here the Apostle says, "Let your requests be made known unto God", and near the end of the chapter he says, "But my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus".

"Let your requests be made known unto God". But you remember, it is "unto God" that you are making known your requests, and therefore it becomes us in our requests that we make at His footstool, to make our requests known in humble submission to His will, assured of this, that He knows what is good for us better than we do. He knows exactly how to deal with us, He knows what things we have need of, and therefore, acknowledging His wisdom and His faithfulness and His power, may we make known our requests. O, for more humble submission to the will of God. "Let your requests be made known unto God". God knows all about it, He knows the things that we desire before we ask Him, and yet it is in His condescending kindness that He permits and invites His poor people to draw near to Him, and continue to tell Him about the things they feel, the things they need, the sorrows that oppress them and the pains that afflict them. He invites His poor people to come and lay these things before Him, and O how condescending and how kind He is!

"Let your requests be made known unto God". And the Lord loves simplicity in His people. When His people are led by His Spirit to draw near to Him, they draw near to Him in spirit as little children. The Lord Jesus, when He taught His disciples to pray, commenced thus, "Our Father, which art in heaven", and then follows, "hallowed be thy name", and in all the requests that we make unto Him it is well for us to have His glory before us. "Hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come". It is

well for us, in making our request unto God, to have before us the interests, the true interests of His kingdom rather than our own. We are for putting our own temporal concerns first, but faith, true faith, will put the interests of Christ's kingdom first. "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things shall be added unto you". Then again, if we make our requests known unto Him there will be a regard for His will. "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven", and not only shall we be exercised to have the will of the Lord done in His dealings with us, but to have His will done by us. Are we concerned that the things that we say and do from day to day shall be according to the will of God?

"Let your requests be made known unto God", unto Him "that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us." "And the peace of God which passeth all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus". You remember the prophet said, "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace (in peace, peace) whose mind is stayed on thee, because he trusteth in Thee", and here we see that it is to be blessed thus, for the mind to be stayed on God. There is a committing of all things unto Him, and there is also a contentment with His dealings with us, there is a resting in Him. "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on Thee", (whose mind stops at God), like the Psalmist who said, "Now Lord, what wait I for? my hope is in Thee". His mind stayed on God, He did not want to look elsewhere for a portion because he found it all in God.

"The peace of God which passeth all understanding". We like to think of Hannah, when she had been making known her requests and pouring out her cares before the Lord, we read, "So the woman went her way, and did eat, and her countenance was no more sad". There came into her heart a measure of this peace of God which passeth all understanding. It is so wonderful, so mysterious a thing, a thing so foreign to fallen human nature and it shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

May the Lord command His blessing, Amen.

+++++

FOR FURTHER COPIES please write to:

I Fuller & Friends, 9 Sibella Road, Clapham,  
London, SW4 6JA, England.