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effective prayer



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Oh that I knew where I might find Him! that I might come even to His seat! I would order my cause before Him, and fill my mouth with arguments.

—Job 23:3-4

Effective Prayer

IN Job's uttermost extremity he cried after the Lord. The longing desire of an afflicted child of God is once more to see his Father's face. His first prayer is not, "Oh that I might be healed of the disease which now festers in every part of my body!" nor even, "Oh that I might see my children restored from the jaws of the grave, and my property once more brought from the hand of the spoiler!" but the first and uttermost cry is "Oh that I knew where I might find Him— who is my God! that I might come even to His seat!"

God's children run home when the storm comes on. It is the heaven-born instinct of a gracious soul to seek shelter from all ills beneath the wings of Jehovah. "He that hath made his refuge God," might serve as the title of a true believer. A hypocrite, when he feels that he has been afflicted by God, resents the infliction, and, like a slave, would run from the master who has scourged him; but not so the true heir of heaven, he kisses the hand which smote him, and seeks shelter from the rod in the bosom of that very God who frowned upon him.

You will observe that the desire to commune with God is intensified by the failure of all other sources of consolation. When Job first saw his friends at a distance, he may have entertained a hope that their kindly counsel and compassionate tenderness would blunt the edge of his grief; but they had not long spoken before he cried out in bitterness, "Miserable comforters are ye all." They put salt into his wounds, they heaped fuel upon the flame of his sorrow, they added the gall of their upbraidings to the wormwood of his griefs. In the sunshine of his smile they once had longed to sun themselves, and now they dare to cast shadows upon his reputation, most ungenerous and undeserved. So the patriarch turned away from his sorry friends and looked up to the celestial throne, just as a traveller turns from his empty skin bottle and betakes himself with all speed to the well. He bids farewell to earthborn hopes, and cries, "Oh that I knew where I might find my God!" Nothing teaches us so much the preciousness of the Creator as when we learn the emptiness of all besides. When you have been pierced through and through with the sentence, "Cursed is he that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm," then will you suck unutterable sweetness from the divine assurance, "Blessed is he that trusteth in the Lord, and whose hope the Lord is." Turning away with bitter scorn from earth's hives, where you found no honey, but many sharp stings, you will rejoice in Him Whose faithful word is sweeter than honey or the honeycomb.

It is further observable that though a good man hastens to God in his trouble,

and runs with all the more speed because of the unkindness of his fellow men, yet sometimes the gracious soul is left without the comfortable presence of God. This is the worst of all griefs; the text is one of Job's deep groans, far deeper than any which came from him on account of the loss of his children and his property: "Oh that I knew where I might find *Him!"* The worst of all losses is to lose the smile of my God. He now had a foretaste of the bitterness of his Redeemer's cry, "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?" God's presence is always with His people in one sense, so far as secretly sustaining them is concerned, but His manifest presence they do not always enjoy. Like the spouse in the song, they seek their beloved by night upon their bed, they seek him but they find him not; and though they wake and roam through the city they may not discover him, and the question may be sadly asked again and again, "Saw ye Him whom my soul loveth?" You may be beloved of God, and yet have no consciousness of that love in your soul. You may be as dear to His heart as Jesus Christ Himself, and yet for a small moment He may forsake you, and in a little wrath He may hide Himself from you.

But at such times the desire of the believing soul gathers yet greater intensity from the fact of God's light being withheld. Instead of saying with proud lip, "Well, if He leaves me I must do without Him; if I cannot have His comfortable presence I must fight on as best may be," the soul says, "No, it is my very life; I must have my God. I perish, I sink in deep mire where there is no standing, and nothing but the arm of God can deliver me." The gracious soul addresses itself with a double zeal to find out God, and sends up its groans, its entreaties, its sobs and sighs to heaven more frequently and fervently. "Oh that I knew where I might find Him!" Distance or labour are as nothing; if the soul only knew where to go she would soon overleap the distance. She makes no stipulation about mountains or rivers, but vows that if she knew where, she would come even to His seat. My soul in her hunger would break through stone walls, or scale the battlements of heaven to reach her God, and though there were seven hells between me and Him, yet would I face the flame if I might reach Him, nothing daunted if I had but the prospect of at last standing in His presence and feeling the delight of His love. That seems to me to be the state of mind in which Job pronounced the words before us.

But we cannot stop at this point. It appears that Job's end, in desiring the presence of God, was that he might pray to Him. He had prayed, but he wanted to pray as in God's presence. He desired to plead as before One whom he knew would hear and help him. He longed to state his own case before the seat of the impartial Judge, before the very face of the all-wise God; he would appeal from the lower courts, where his friends judged unrighteous judgment, to the Court of

King's Bench—the High Court of heaven—there, says he, "I would order my cause before Him, and fill my mouth with arguments."

In this latter verse Job teaches us how he meant to plead and intercede with God. He does, as it were, reveal the secrets of his closet, and unveils the art of prayer. We are here admitted into the guild of suppliants; we are shown the art and mystery of pleading; we have here taught to us the blessed handicraft and science of prayer, and if we can be bound apprentice to Job and can have a lesson from Job's Master, we may acquire no little skill in interceding with God.

1
Ordering Our Cause Before God

There is a popular notion that prayer is a very easy thing, a kind of common business that may be done anyhow, without care or effort. Some think that you have only to reach a book down and get through a certain number of very excellent words, and you have prayed and may put the book up again. Others suppose that to use a book is superstitious and that you ought rather to repeat extemporaneous sentences, sentences which come to your mind with a rush, like a herd of swine or a pack of hounds, and that when you have uttered them with some little attention to what you have said, you have prayed.

Now neither of these modes of prayer were adopted by ancient saints. They appear to have thought a great deal more seriously of prayer than many do nowadays. It seems to have been a mighty business with them, a long-practised exercise, in which some of them attained great eminence, and were thereby singularly blest. They reaped great harvests in the field of prayer, and found the mercy seat to be a mine of untold treasures.

The ancient saints were given, with Job, to ordering their cause before God. As a petitioner coming into court does not come there without thought to state his case on the spur of the moment, but enters into the audience chamber with his suit well prepared, having also learned how he ought to behave himself in the presence of the great one to whom he is appealing; so it is well to approach the seat of the King of kings as much as possible with premeditation and preparation, knowing what we are about, where we are standing, and what it is which we desire to obtain. In times of peril and distress we may fly to God just as we are, as the dove enters the cleft of the rock, even though her plumes are ruffled; but in ordinary times we should not come with an unprepared spirit, even as a child does not come to his father in the morning till he has washed his face.

See the priest over there; he has a sacrifice to offer, but he does not rush into the court of the priests and hack at the bullock with the first pole-axe upon which he can lay his hand, but when he rises he washes his feet at the brazen laver, he puts on his garments, and adorns himself with his priestly vestments. Then he comes to the altar with his victim properly divided according to the law, and is careful to do according to the command, even to such a simple matter as the placing of the fat, and the liver, and the kidneys. He takes the blood in a bowl and pours it in an appropriate place at the foot of the altar, not throwing it just as

it may occur to him, and he kindles the fire not with common flame, but with the sacred fire off the altar. Now this ritual is all superseded, but the truth which it taught remains the same; our spiritual sacrifices should be offered with holy carefulness. God forbid that our prayer should be a mere leaping out of bed and kneeling down, and saying anything that comes first to hand. On the contrary, may we wait upon the Lord with holy fear and sacred awe.

See how David prayed when God had blessed him—he went in before the Lord. Understand that; he did not stand outside at a distance, but he went in before the Lord and he sat down—for sitting is not a bad posture for prayer, let who will speak against it—and sitting down quietly and calmly before the Lord he then began to pray, but not until first he had thought over the divine goodness, and so attained to the spirit of prayer. Then by the assistance of the Holy Ghost did he open his mouth. Oh that we oftener sought the Lord in this manner!

David puts it, "In the morning will I direct my prayer unto Thee, and will look up"; which I have frequently explained to you to mean that he marshalled his thoughts like men of war, or that he aimed his prayers like arrows. He did not take the arrow and put it on the bowstring and shoot, and shoot, and shoot anywhere; but after he had taken out the chosen shaft, and fitted it to the string, he took deliberate aim. He looked— looked well—at the white of the target; kept his eye fixed on it, directing his prayer, and then drew his bow with all his strength and let the arrow fly; and then, when the shaft had left his hand, what does he say? "I will look up." He looked up to see where the arrow went, to see what effect it had; for he expected an answer to his prayers, and was not as many who scarcely think of their prayers after they have uttered them. David knew that he had an engagement before him which required all his mental powers; he marshalled up his faculties and went about the work in a workmanlike manner, as one who believed in it and meant to succeed. We should plough carefully and pray carefully. The better the work the more attention it deserves. To be anxious in the shop and thoughtless in the closet is little less than blasphemy, for it is an insinuation that anything will do for God, but the world must have our best.

If any ask what order should be observed in prayer, I am not about to give you a scheme such as many have drawn out, in which adoration, confession, petition, intercession, and ascription are arranged in succession. I am not persuaded that any such order is of divine authority. It is to no mere mechanical order I have been referring, for our prayers will be equally acceptable, and possibly equally proper, in any form; for there are specimens of prayers, in all shapes, in the Old and New Testaments.

The true spiritual order of prayer seems to me to consist in something more than mere arrangement. It is most fitting for us to feel that we are now doing

something that is real; that we are about to address ourselves to God, Whom we cannot see, but Who is really present; Whom we can neither touch nor hear, nor by our senses can apprehend, but Who, nevertheless, is as truly with us as though we were speaking to a friend of flesh and blood like ourselves. Feeling the reality of God's presence, our mind will be led by divine grace into a humble state; we shall feel like Abraham, when he said, "I have taken upon myself to speak unto God, I that am but dust and ashes." Consequently we shall not deliver ourselves of our prayer as boys repeating their lessons, as a mere matter of routine, much less shall we speak as if we were rabbis instructing our pupils, or as I have heard some do, with the coarseness of a highwayman stopping a person on the road and demanding his purse of him; but we shall be humble yet bold petitioners, humbly importuning mercy through the Saviour's blood. We shall not have the reserve of a slave but the loving reverence of a child, yet not an impudent, impertinent child, but a teachable obedient child, honouring his Father, and therefore asking earnestly, but with deferential submission to his Father's will. When I feel that I am in the presence of God, and take my rightful position in that presence, the next thing I shall want to recognise will be that I have no right to what I am seeking, and cannot expect to obtain it except as a gift of grace, and I must recollect that God limits the channel through which He will give me mercy —He will give it to me through His dear Son. Let me put myself then under the patronage of the great Redeemer. Let me feel that now it is no longer I that speak but Christ that speaketh with me, and that while I plead, I plead His wounds, His life, His death, His blood, Himself. This is truly getting into order.

What am I to ask for? It is most proper in prayer, to aim at great distinctness of supplication. There is much reason to complain of some public prayers, that those who offer them do not really ask God for anything. I must acknowledge I fear to having so prayed myself, and certainly to having heard many prayers of the kind, in which I did not feel that anything was sought for from God—a great deal of very excellent doctrinal and experimental matter uttered, but little real petitioning, and that little in a nebulous kind of state, chaotic and unformed. But it seems to me that prayer should be distinct, the asking for something definitely and distinctly because the mind has realised its distinct need of such a thing, and therefore must plead for it. It is well not to beat round the bush in prayer, but to come directly to the point. I like that prayer of Abraham's, "Oh that Ishmael might live before thee!" There is the name and the person prayed for, and the blessing desired, all put in a few words,—"Ishmael might live before thee." Many persons would have used a roundabout expression of this kind, "Oh that our beloved offspring might be regarded with the favour which Thou bearest to

those who," etc. Say *"Ishmael,"* if you mean "Ishmael"; put it in plain words before the Lord. Some people cannot even pray for the minister without using such circular descriptives that you might think it were the parish beadle, or somebody whom it did not do to mention too particularly.

Why not be distinct, and say what we mean as well as mean what we say? Ordering our cause would bring us to greater distinctness of mind. It is not necessary in the closet to ask for every supposable good thing; it is not necessary to rehearse the catalogue of every want that you may have, have had, can have, or shall have. Ask for what you now need, and, as a rule, keep to present need; ask for your daily bread —what you want now—ask for that. Ask for it plainly, as before God, who does not regard your fine expressions, and to whom your eloquence and oratory will be less than nothing and vanity. You are before the Lord; let your words be few, but let your heart be fervent.

You have not quite completed the ordering when you have asked for what you want through Jesus Christ. There should be a looking round the blessing which you desire, to see whether it is assuredly a fitting thing to ask; for some prayers would never be offered if men did but think. A little reflection would show to us that some things which we desire were better let alone. We may, moreover, have a motive at the bottom of our desire which is not Christ-like, a selfish motive, which forgets God's glory and caters only for our own ease and comfort. Now although we may ask for things which are for our profit, yet still we must never let our profit interfere in any way with the glory of God. There must be mingled with acceptable prayer the holy salt of submission to the divine will. I like Luther's saying, "Lord, I *will* have my will of Thee at this time." "What!" say you, "Like such an expression as that?" I do, because of the next clause, which was, "I will have my will, *for I know that my will is Thy will."* That is well spoken, Luther; but without the last words it would have been wicked presumption. When we are sure that what we ask for is for God's glory, then, if we have power in prayer, we may say, "I will not let Thee go except Thou bless me": we may come to close dealings with God, and like Jacob with the angel we may even wrestle and seek to give the angel the fall sooner than be sent away without the benediction. But we must be quite clear, before we come to such terms as those, that what we are seeking is really for the Master's honour.

Put these three things together, the deep spirituality which recognises prayer as being real conversation with the invisible God—much distinctness which is the reality of prayer, asking for what we know we want—and much fervency, believing the thing to be necessary, and therefore resolving to obtain it if it can be had by prayer, and above all these, complete submission, leaving it still with the Master's will;—commingle all these, and you have a clear idea of what it is

to order your cause before the Lord.

Still prayer itself is an art which only the Holy Ghost can teach us. He is the giver of all prayer. Pray for prayer—pray till you can pray; pray to be helped to pray, and give not up praying because you cannot pray, for it is when you think you cannot pray that you are most praying. Sometimes when you have no sort of comfort in your supplications, it is then that your heart all broken and cast down is really wrestling and truly prevailing with the Most High.

II
Filling Our Mouth With Arguments

Not filling the mouth with words nor good phrases, nor pretty expressions, but filling the mouth with arguments, as the ancient saints were wont to argue in prayer. When we come to the gate of mercy forcible arguments are the knocks of the rapper by which the gate is opened.

Why are arguments to be used at all? The reply is, certainly not because God is slow to give, not because we can change the divine purpose, not because God needs to be informed of any circumstance with regard to ourselves or of anything in connection with the mercy asked. The arguments to be used are for our own benefit not for His. He requires us to plead with Him, and to bring forth our strong reasons, as Isaiah says, because this will show that we feel the value of the mercy. When a man searches for arguments for a thing it is because he attaches importance to that which he is seeking.

Again, our use of arguments teaches us the ground upon which we obtain the blessing. If a man should come with the argument of his own merit, he would never succeed; the successful argument is always founded upon grace, and hence the soul so pleading is made to understand intensely that it is by grace and by grace alone that a sinner obtains anything of the Lord. Besides, the use of arguments is intended to stir up our fervency. The man who uses one argument with God will get more force in using the next, and will use the next with still greater power, and the next with more force still. The best prayers I have ever heard in our prayer meetings have been those which have been fullest of argument. Sometimes my soul has been fairly melted down when I have listened to brethren who have come before God feeling the mercy to be really needed, and that they must have it, for they first pleaded with God to give it for this reason, and then for a second, and then for a third, and then for a fourth and a fifth, until they have awakened the fervency of the entire assembly.

There is no need for prayer at all as far as God is concerned, but what a need there is for it on our own account! If we were not constrained to pray, I question whether we could even live as Christians. If God's mercies came to us unasked, they would not be half so useful as they now are, when they have to be sought for; for now we get a double blessing, a blessing in the obtaining, and a blessing in the seeking. The very act of prayer is a blessing. To pray is as it were to bathe oneself in a cool stream, and so to escape from the heats of earth's summer sun. To pray is to mount on eagle's wings above the clouds and get into the clear

heaven where God dwells. To pray is to enter the treasure-house of God and to enrich oneself out of an inexhaustible storehouse. To pray is to grasp heaven in one's arms, to embrace the Deity within one's soul, and to feel one's body made a temple of the Holy Ghost. Apart from the answer, prayer is in itself a benediction. To pray is to cast off your burdens, it is to tear away your rags, it is to shake off your diseases, it is to be filled with spiritual vigour, it is to reach the highest point of Christian health. God give us to be much in the holy art of arguing with God in prayer.

The most interesting part of our subject remains; it is a very rapid summary and catalogue of a few of the arguments which have been used with great success with God. I cannot give you a full list; that would require a treatise such as John Owen might produce.

1. God's Attributes

Abraham pleaded this when he laid hold upon God's justice. Sodom was to be prayed for, and Abraham begins,

Peradventure there be fifty righteous within the city: wilt thou also destroy and not spare the place for the fifty righteous that are therein? That be far from Thee to do after this manner, to slay the righteous with the wicked: and that the righteous should be as the wicked, that be far from Thee. Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?

Here the wrestling begins. It was a powerful argument by which the patriarch grasped the Lord's left hand, and arrested it just when the thunderbolt was about to fall. But there came a reply to it. It was intimated to him that this would not spare the city, and you notice how the good man, when sorely pressed, retreated by inches; and at last, when he could no longer lay hold upon justice, grasped God's right hand of mercy, and that gave him a wondrous hold when he asked that if there were but ten righteous there the city might be spared. So you and I may take hold at any time upon the justice, the mercy, the faithfulness, the wisdom, the longsuffering, the tenderness of God, and we shall find every attribute of the Most High to be, as it were, a great battering-ram, with which we may open the gates of heaven.

2. God's Promise

When Jacob was on the other side of the brook Jabbok, and his brother Esau was coming with armed men, he pleaded with God not to allow Esau to destroy the mother and the children, and as a master reason he pleaded,

And Thou saidst, Surely I will do thee good.

Oh the force of that plea! He was holding God to His word: "Thou saidst." The attribute is a splendid horn of the altar to lay hold upon; but the promise, which has in it the attribute and something more, is a yet mightier holdfast. "Thou saidst." Remember how David put it. After Nathan had spoken the promise, David said at the close of his prayer, "Do as Thou hast said." That is a

legitimate argument with every honest man, and has *He* said, and shall He not do it? "Let God be true, and every man a liar." Shall not *He* be true? Shall *He* not keep His word? Shall not every word that comes out of His lips stand fast and be fulfilled?

Solomon, at the opening of the temple, used the same mighty plea. He pleads with God to remember the word which He had spoken to his father David, and to bless that place. When a man gives a promissory note his honour is engaged. He signs his hand, and he must discharge it when the due time comes, or else he loses credit. It shall never be said that God dishonours His bills. The credit of the Most High never was impeached, and never shall be. He is punctual to the moment; He never is before His time, but He never is behind it. You shall search His Book through, and you shall compare it with the experience of God's people, and the two tally from the first to the last; and many a hoary patriarch has said with Joshua in his old age, "Not one good thing has failed of all that the Lord God has promised: all has come to pass." If you have a divine promise, you need not plead that with an "if" in it; you may plead with a certainty. If for the mercy which you are now asking, you have God's solemnly pledged word, there will scarce be any room for the caution about submission to His will. You know His will. That will is in the promise; plead it. Do not give Him rest until He fulfill it. He meant to fulfill it, or else He would not have given it. God does not give His words merely to quiet our noise, and to keep us hopeful for a while, with the intention of putting us off at last; but when He speaks, He speaks because He means to act.

3. The Great Name of God

How mightily did Moses argue with God on one occasion upon this ground!

What wilt Thou do for Thy great name? The Egyptians will say, Because the Lord could not bring them into the land, therefore He slew them in the wilderness.

There are some occasions when the name of God is very closely tied up with the history of His people. Sometimes in reliance upon a divine promise, a believer will be led to take a certain course of action. Now, if the Lord should not be as good as His promise, not only is the believer deceived, but the wicked world looking on would say, Aha! aha! Where is your God? Take the case of our respected brother, Mr. Muller, of Bristol. For many years he declared that God hears prayer, and firm in that conviction, he went on to build house after house for the maintenance of orphans. Now, I can very well conceive that, if he had been driven to a point of want of means for the maintenance of those thousand or two thousand children, he might very well have used the plea, "What wilt Thou do for Thy great name?" And you, in some severe trouble, when you have fairly received the promise, may say, "Lord, Thou hast said, 'In six troubles I will be

with thee, and in seven I will not forsake thee.' I have told my friends and neighbours that I put my trust in Thee, and if Thou do not deliver me now, where is Thy name? Arise, O God, and do this thing, lest Thy honour be cast into the dust."

Coupled with this, we may employ the further argument of *the hard things said by the revilers.* It was well done of Hezekiah when he took Rabshakeh's letter and spread it before the Lord. Will that help him? It is full of blasphemy, will that help him?

Where are the gods of Arphad and Sepharvaim? Where are the gods of the cities which I have overthrown? Let not Hezekiah deceive you, saying that Jehovah will deliver you.

Does that have any effect? Oh yes! It was a blessed thing that Rabshakeh wrote that letter, for it provoked the Lord to help His people. Sometimes the child of God can rejoice when he sees his enemies get thoroughly out of temper and take to reviling. "Now," he says, "they have reviled the Lord Himself; not me alone have they assailed, but the Most High Himself." Now it is no longer the poor insignificant Hezekiah with his little band of soldiers, but it is Jehovah, the King of angels, who has come to fight against Rabshakeh. Now what will you do, O boastful soldier of proud Sennacherib? Will you not be utterly destroyed, since Jehovah Himself has come into the fray? All the progress that is made by popery, all the wrong things said by speculative atheists and so on, should be by Christians used as an argument with God, why He should help the gospel. Lord; see how they reproach the gospel of Jesus! Pluck Thy right hand out of Thy bosom! O God, they defy Thee! Antichrist thrusts itself into the place where Thy Son once was honoured, and from the very pulpits where the gospel was once preached, popery is now declared. Arise, O God, wake up Thy zeal, let Thy sacred passions burn! Thine ancient foe again prevails. Behold the harlot of Babylon once more upon her scarlet-coloured beast rides forth in triumph! Come Jehovah, come, Jehovah, and once again show what Thy bare arm can do! This is a legitimate mode of pleading with God, for His great name's sake.

4. The Sorrows of God's People

This is frequently pleaded in the Bible. Jeremiah is the great master of this art. He says,

Her Nazarites were purer than snow, they were whiter than milk, they were more ruddy in body than rubies, their polishing was of sapphire: their visage is blacker than a coal.

The precious sons of Zion, comparable to fine gold, how are they esteemed as earthen pitchers, the work of the hands of the potter!

He talks of all their griefs and straitnesses in the siege. He calls upon the Lord to look upon His suffering Zion; and before long his plaintive cries are heard. Nothing so eloquent with the father as his child's cry; yes, there is one thing more mighty still, and that is a moan—when the child is so sick that it is

past crying, and lies moaning with that kind of moan which indicates extreme suffering and intense weakness. Who can resist that moan? And when God's Israel shall be brought very low so that they can scarcely cry but only their moans are heard, then comes the Lord's time of deliverance, and He is sure to show that He loves His people. Whenever you also are brought into the same condition you may plead your moanings, and when you see a church brought very low you may use her griefs as an argument why God should return and save the remnant of His people.

5. The Past

Experienced people of God, you know how to plead this. Here is David's specimen of it:

Thou *hast* been my help. Leave me not, neither forsake me.

He pleads God's mercy to him from his youth up. He speaks of being cast upon his God from his very birth, and then he pleads, "Now also, when I am old and greyheaded, O God, forsake me not." Moses also, speaking with God, says, "Thou *didst* bring this people up out of Egypt." As if he would say, "Do not leave Thy work unfinished; Thou hast begun to build, complete it. Thou hast fought the first battle; Lord, end the campaign! Go on till Thou gettest a complete victory." How often have we cried in our trouble, "Lord, Thou didst deliver me in such and such a sharp trial, when it seemed as if no help were near; Thou hast never forsaken me yet. I have set up my Ebenezer in Thy name. If Thou hadst intended to leave me why hast Thou showed me such things? Hast Thou brought Thy servant to this place to put him to shame?" We have to deal with an unchanging God, Who will do in the future what He has done in the past, because He never turns from His purpose, and cannot be thwarted in His design; the past thus becomes a very mighty means of winning blessings from Him.

We may even use *our own unworthiness* as an argument with God. "Out of the eater comes forth meat, and out of the strong comes forth sweetness." David in one place pleads thus: "Lord, have mercy upon mine iniquity, for it is great." That is a very singular mode of reasoning; but being interpreted it means, "Lord, why shouldest thou go about doing little things? Thou art a great God, and here is a great sinner. Here is a fitness in me for the display of Thy grace. The greatness of my sin makes me a platform for the greatness of Thy mercy. Let the greatness of Thy love be seen in me." Moses seems to have the same on his mind when he asks God to show His great power in sparing His sinful people. The power with which God restrains Himself is great indeed. There is such a thing as creeping down at the foot of the throne, crouching low and crying, "O God, break me not —I am a bruised reed. Tread not on my little life, it is now but as the smoking flax. Wilt Thou hunt me? Wilt Thou come out, as David said, 'after

a dead dog, after a flea?' Wilt Thou pursue me as a leaf that is blown in the tempest? Wilt Thou watch me, as Job said, as though I were a vast sea, or a great whale? I am so little, and because the greatness of Thy mercy can be shown in one so insignificant and yet so vile, therefore, O God, have mercy upon me."

There was once an occasion when *the very Godhead of Jehovah* made a triumphant plea for the prophet Elijah. On that august occasion, when he had bidden his adversaries see whether their god could answer them by fire, you can little guess the excitement there must have been in the prophet's mind. With what stern sarcasm did he say, "Cry aloud: for he is a god; either he is talking, or he is pursuing, or he is in a journey, or peradventure he sleepeth, and must be awakened." And as they cut themselves with knives, and leaped upon the altar, oh the scorn with which that man of God must have looked down upon their impotent exertions, and their earnest but useless cries! But think of how his heart must have palpitated, if it had not been for the strength of his faith, when he repaired the altar of God that was broken down, and laid the wood in order, and killed the bullock. Hear him cry, "Pour water on it. You shall not suspect me of concealing fire; pour water on the victim." When they had done so, he bids them "Do it a second time"; and they did it a second time; and then he says, "Do it a third time." And when it was all covered with water, soaked and saturated through, then he stands up and cries to God, "O God, let it be known that Thou only art God." Here everything was put to the test. Jehovah's own existence was now put, as it were, at stake, before the eyes of men by this bold prophet. But how well the prophet was heard! Down came the fire and devoured not only the sacrifice, but even the wood, and the stones, and even the very water that was in the trenches, for Jehovah God had answered His servant's prayer. We sometimes may do the same, and say unto Him, "Oh, by Thy Deity, by Thine existence, if indeed Thou be God, now show Thyself for the help of Thy people!"

6. The Sufferings, Death, Merit, and Intercession of Christ Jesus

I am afraid we do not understand what it is that we have at our command when we are allowed to plead with God for Christ's sake. I met with this thought the other day: it was something new to me, but I believe it ought not to have been. When we ask God to hear us, pleading Christ's name, we usually mean, "O Lord, Thy dear Son deserves this of Thee; do this unto me because of what He merits." But if we knew it we might go farther. Supposing you should say to me, you who keep a warehouse in the city, "Sir, call at my office, and use my name, and say that they are to give you such a thing." I should go in and use your name, and I should obtain my request as a matter of right and a matter of necessity. This is virtually what Jesus Christ says to us. "If you need anything of God, all that the Father has belongs to Me; go and use My name." Suppose you

should give a man your chequebook signed with your own name and left blank, to be filled up as he chose; that would be very nearly what Jesus has done in these words, "If ye ask anything in My name I will give it you." If I had a good name at the bottom of the cheque I should be sure that I should get it cashed when I went to the banker with it; so when you have got Christ's name, to whom the very justice of God has become a debtor, and whose merits have claims with the Most High, when you have

Christ's name there is no need to speak with fear and trembling and bated breath. Waver not and let not faith stagger! When you plead the name of Christ you plead that which shakes the gates of hell, and which the hosts of heaven obey, and God Himself feels the sacred power of that divine plea.

You would do better if you sometimes thought more in your prayers of Christ's griefs and groans. Bring before the Lord His wounds, tell the Lord of His cries, make the groans of Jesus cry again from Gethsemane, and His blood speak again from that frozen Calvary. Speak out and tell the Lord that with such griefs, and cries, and groans to plead, you cannot take a denial.

III
Praise and Thanksgiving

If the Holy Ghost shall teach us how to order our cause, and how to fill our mouth with arguments, the result shall, be that we shall have our mouth filled with praises. The man who has his mouth full or arguments in prayer shall soon have his mouth full of benedictions in answer to prayer. You have your mouth full this morning, have you? What of? Full of complaining? Pray the Lord to rinse your mouth out of that black stuff, for it will little avail you, and it will turn bitter within you one of these days. Oh have your mouth full of prayer, full of it, full of arguments so that there is room for nothing else. Then you shall soon go away with whatsoever you have asked of God. "Delight thyself also in the Lord, and He will give thee the desires of thine heart."

It is said—I know not how truly—that the explanation of the text, "Open thy mouth wide and I will fill it," may be found in a very singular Oriental custom. It is said that not many years ago—I remember the circumstances being reported—the King of Persia ordered the chief of his nobility, who had done something or other which greatly gratified him, to open his mouth, and when he had done so he began to put into his mouth pearls, diamonds, rubies, and emeralds, till he had filled it as full as it could hold, and then he bade him go his way. This is said to have been occasionally done in

Oriental Courts towards great favourites. Now certainly whether that be an explanation of the text or not it is an illustration of it. God says, "Open thy mouth with arguments," and then He will fill it with mercies priceless, gems unspeakably valuable. Would not a man open his mouth wide when he had to have it filled in such a manner? Surely the most simple-minded among you would be wise enough for that. Let us then open wide our mouth when we have to plead with God. Our needs are great, let our askings be great, and the supply shall be great too. You are not straitened in Him; you are straitened in yourselves. The Lord give you large-mouthedness in prayer, great potency, not in the use of language, but in employing arguments.

What I have been speaking to the Christian is applicable in great measure to the unconverted man. God give you to see the force of it, and to fly in humble prayer to the Lord Jesus Christ and to find eternal life in Him.

PASTORAL BOOKLETS

EFFECTIVE PRAYER

A study based on Job 23 : 4

" **We** *are here admitted into the guild of suppliants, we are shown the art and mystery of pleading; we have here taught to us the blessed handicraft and science of prayer; and if we can be bound apprentice to Job and can have a lesson from Job's Master***, we** *may acquire no little skill in interceding with* God/'

ONE SHILLING

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