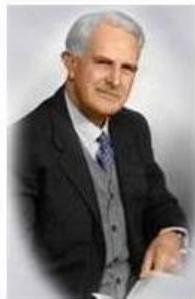


*In Touch
with the
Throne*



Theodore Austin-Sparks

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by Theodore Austin-Sparks

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Chapter 1- The Divine Basis of All Acceptable Prayer

As we contemplate the great ministry of prayer, I think it would be most helpful if at the outset we were reminded of the Divine basis of all acceptable prayer. Before we come to what may be more technical we must recognize the spiritual foundation of prayer, and that has to do with the ingredients and the sacredness of the incense which was to be burnt upon the golden altar referred to in Exodus 30, verse 34 onwards.

It is not my intention to take up these ingredients for exposition, but simply to note that the Lord stipulated certain things for the sweet spices, and then made a very strong statement in relation to them: *"...ye shall not make to yourselves according to the composition thereof; it shall be unto thee holy for the Lord. Whosoever shall make like unto that, to smell thereto, shall even be cut off from his people."* That is the basis of all acceptable prayer. As we know, the sweet spices, the ingredients of the incense, typify the moral excellencies of the Lord Jesus: His graces, virtues, merits and worthiness. The incense is not the prayers of the saints, but the merit and worthiness of the Lord Jesus put into the prayers, mingled with the prayers, and becoming that which brings the prayers in effectiveness and acceptance to the presence of God.

There is completeness here, inasmuch as the ingredients are fourfold: the completeness of the graces and virtues and moral excellencies of Christ. And then, as you notice, salt (which always speaks of preserving things in life) is to be mingled with these other ingredients, and that seems to me to suggest that even the presentation of the moral excellencies of the Lord Jesus is always to be free from merely cold formality, which means death, and must remain a living and vital thing. It is so possible for a contemplation of the Lord Jesus to become a mechanical and formal thing, something which we accept in our minds as necessary and true, so that we come mechanically upon the merits of the Lord Jesus, when the Lord wants the thing to be continuously alive. With every fresh coming to the Lord there should be a fresh appreciation in life of the Lord Jesus. The salt is to keep things from death, to keep them in life, to keep them fresh and to keep them keen, and we are required to have an abiding keenness and aliveness of appreciation of these excellencies of the Lord Jesus. If it is so, then prayer is acceptable and effectual. The salt is not one of the ingredients, but something added in, and that something is that which is incorruptible.

Then we have the very definite stipulation that nothing like this was to be made by man himself or for himself. There was to be no imitation of this, and there was to be no private and personal appropriation of it by man. It was to be held always unto the Lord and to be holy to the Lord, and an infringement of that rule meant death. As we know, on one occasion the offering of false fire resulted in judgment and death. So here we are told that if this thing were made by man, an imitation of it made for himself and for his own personal ends, he would be cut off from among his people. The moral excellencies of the Lord Jesus cannot be imitated. Man cannot have them in himself, and anything feigned is unacceptable to God. There are no excellencies, and there are no glories like those of the Lord Jesus.

Here we have God most definitely and positively saying in effect that there is a uniqueness, an exclusiveness about the character of the Lord Jesus which is unapproachable by man and altogether apart from the very best that man can make of

himself. God sees in the Lord Jesus that which is not anywhere else, and for any man to come imitating the merits of the Lord Jesus means death for that man. There is no ground of approach to God in our moral glories, and it is an awful blasphemy to talk about the sacrifice and the laying down of life on the part of men for their fellow-creatures being on a par with the laying down of His life by the Lord Jesus. That is utter blasphemy, and it must come under the most utter judgment of God. No! God sees nothing equal to the moral excellencies of His Son and forbids us to try to bring anything which is an imitation of those, a man-made thing, which does not recognize the uniqueness of the Lord Jesus.

So the ground of all acceptable prayer upon which we approach the Father is that of the moral excellencies and glories, and graces, and virtues, and merits, and worthiness of the Lord Jesus. That is very simple, but it is basic, and we do have to recognize that before we can get anywhere in the matter of prayer.

The Five Aspects of Prayer

Now we are able to go on with the subject of prayer itself. In the first place I want to say a little about the nature of prayer, or that which makes prayer, from its different standpoints. And while there may be many other aspects, I think we may say that prayer has five main aspects: communion, submission, petition, co-operation and conflict. Prayer is each one of these, and prayer in its fullness requires or involves all of them.

Prayer as Communion

Firstly, prayer is communion, prayer is fellowship, prayer is love opening the heart to God, and that is the foundation of all true forms of prayer. We may liken it to the two main activities of our human bodies. When we speak of the activities of these physical bodies we speak of what is organic, and then of what is functional. Organic trouble is a very serious thing, but a functional trouble may not be so serious, and prayer as communion takes the place of the organic in our bodies. One part of our organic make-up is our breathing, which we call respiration. Now, you never stop to think about that! You never reason that out and say: 'Shall I take another breath?' 'Shall I breathe?' or 'How many more breaths shall I take today?' You may do that over a meal, for that is functional, but you never do it over your respiration, for that is organic. You may discuss whether you will walk, or talk, or think, and you may tell yourself that you will stop thinking, or walking, or talking. That is functional. It is controlled and deliberate, but you do not do that over your breathing. That goes on. But if your respiration should give out, your walking, talking and thinking would give out, so that respiration is basic to everything else.

And prayer as communion is in the spiritual life what respiration is in the physical. Communion with God is a sustained thing, a thing like breathing which goes on, or should go on. It differs altogether from those periodical functional activities such as feeding. Respiration is quite involuntary and not just deliberate. We may call it a habit, and a habit is something which easily eludes the full consciousness of the one who is addicted to it. We do things habitually without being aware at the time that we are doing them. When a habit is fully formed it is just an unconscious part of our procedure, and communion with God is that - something that goes on. Prayer as communion is just that:

we are in touch with the Lord and we spontaneously and involuntarily open our heart to Him. That is the first foundational thing in all prayer, and that is something to which we shall have to give attention. While we never discuss the question as to whether we will breathe or not, there is such a thing as developing right breathing, and in this sense we shall have to give attention to our breathing.

I think that of all the people I ever met who exemplified this organic life in fellowship with God, Dr. F. B. Meyer was outstanding. It did not matter where he was or what the circumstances were, he would suddenly stop, perhaps in dictating a letter, or in a conversation, or in a business meeting, and just say: 'Stop a minute!' and he prayed. And that was his habit in life. He seemed at any moment to be in touch with the Lord. It was like breathing to him, and I believe it represented one of the secrets of the fruitfulness of his life and the value of his judgment in the things of the Lord. Only those who had close touch with him, especially in difficult executive meetings, knew the value of that spiritual judgment which he brought to bear upon situations, and it seemed to come to him just like that, as out from the Lord.

Well, that is prayer in its foundation. It is communion, it is fellowship and the spontaneous opening of the heart to the Lord. It is not the whole range of prayer, but it is life lived at the back of all deliberate activities, life in touch with the Lord, and it is a very, very valuable thing. All other prayer is so much more effective if we have that. It is so different from life being just a matter of prayer in emergencies, and emergencies are very often much more critical than they need be because we have to find our way back to God instead of being there. I think that very often the Lord allows emergencies to come to us in order to restore fellowship with Himself which has been lost, and in the Lord's mind the abiding fruit of such an emergency is that we should not lose that fellowship again. We should keep hold of it.

Prayer as Submission

Then, secondly, prayer is submission, and here we must be aware of the possibility of a contradiction in terms. Prayer is submission. Passive inaction in what is called trust is not prayer. We have heard people speak of trust, which for them means just passivity and inaction, but it is not prayer. Submission is always active, not passive. Submission always involves the will; it does not dismiss the will. Now carefully keep hold of that. Many people think that just trustfully leaning on the Lord is submission, and their address to the Lord takes its character from such a state, but that is not prayer. Unquestioning acquiescence in things as we find them is not submission, and it is not prayer. Submission means getting into line with the Divine mind. That may mean conflict, it will almost invariably mean action, and it will bring in the volition. Prayer, from whatever standpoint you regard it, is always positive. It is never passive. Trust is another thing and does not come into the realm of prayer. Faith comes into the realm of prayer, but faith is always an active thing and never a passive thing. Faith may require a battle, and it very often does, to get to a place of rest, but the 'rest of faith' is not what we have called unquestioning acquiescence. The 'rest of faith' means that the last stage of adjustment to the Divine mind has been reached. Submission is not merely the suppression of desire, but the bringing of desire into line with the Divine will, and, if needs be, changing desire. Desire may be a very strong thing, a mighty propelling force,

but a propelling force ought to be so much under control that it can be switched into the direction of an arresting force. To propel a train, a tremendous amount of power and force is required, but a modern train is so arranged that the mighty propelling force which carries it forward can in a moment be switched to its brakes to pull it to a halt. In prayer, where submission is in view, that is very often what has to be done. That strength of desire has to be arrested in one direction and brought into another direction, perhaps from propelling us forward to bringing us to a standstill in the will of God. That is submission. You see, submission is an active thing, a positive thing.

I anticipate that there will be many questions in this connection, but it is very important to recognize that prayer in its second aspect is submission, which is a positive thing. It is not just collapsing before God and saying: 'Well, I trust that everything will turn out all right. I just acquiesce in things as they are and leave it with the Lord.' Submission is coming positively into line with God's will, God's desire and God's mind. That very often means the deepest conflict, and sometimes heartbreak, but it is necessary. We will touch that again later.

Prayer as Petition

Thirdly, prayer is petition, request, or asking. That is all the same, whichever word you prefer. Here we touch what is perhaps the major aspect in the activity of prayer. Undoubtedly it has the largest place in Scripture, and it really defines the meaning of the word 'prayer.'

From a scriptural standpoint prayer is rightly taken to mean petition, and if you go through the Word of God you will find that prayer represents petition in an overwhelming measure. Perhaps we do not need very much argument along that line to prove or persuade that it is so, but I am quite sure that before we are through we shall see that a note of emphasis is necessary, for, after all, our main problems arise in the direction of asking, in the realm of petition. We shall go on praying, of course, and we shall go on asking, in spite of them all. I trust that we shall, but it is as well for us to have the ground well laid for petition, for request, for asking, and for us to recognize clearly, and be fully assured, that there is an objective efficacy in prayer. I do not doubt but that all of us at some time or other have a little catch in our prayers of request and asking because of a little mental something that comes in and undermines certainty. What I am talking about is the objective efficacy of prayer, that is, prayer which has power to change things objectively and not merely have an influence upon us inwardly, prayer which brings answers outside of ourselves. Petition, request, asking, as set over against all false arguments, such as: Divine omniscience makes prayer *unnecessary*; God knows everything; He knows what He will do, how He will do it, and He knows the end of all things from the beginning, so why pray? Or again: Divine goodness makes prayer superfluous. God is good, compassionate, merciful and longsuffering. He will only do the best, for He is love, so prayer is *superfluous*. Why petition the Lord to do good, to be gracious, to show kindness and to do the best for us? Why not trust the goodness of God? Prayer is superfluous. Or once more: Divine foreordination makes prayer *useless*. If God has settled things eternally, predestination holds good, so it is *useless* to pray. Or, running alongside of that, Divine sovereignty - the fact that God rules and overrules, He is in the throne of government and has all things in His hands

and in His power - makes prayer lack of *faith*. Why ask, why pray, why petition, why request, when all things are in God's hands and He is ruling and over-ruling, governing and directing in His sovereignty? Once more: the Divine vastness of law and purpose makes prayer *presumptuous*. It is presumption to ask God to change things when He has fixed everything according to His eternal laws and things are moving in correspondence with a set order. It is presumption to expect the Lord to go out of His order, or to ask Him to do so. (See chapter 4.)

Now, you may not have put things like that, and those questions may never have arisen in your minds in that way, but I venture to suggest that, whether those words have been in your mind or not, whether you have put things like that or not, what is contained in them has from time to time crept subtly into your prayer-life, has affected it and taken some of the grip out of it. When you have been praying an indefinable something has crept in: 'Well, the Lord knows what He will do so why should I beseech Him? The Lord is good and gracious, so why should I ask Him? The Lord knows the end from the beginning, so why should I not just trust Him? The Lord's purposes are fixed, so why should I begin to wrestle with Him to change things? He will work out His purpose and He is of set mind, so who can change Him?' Prayer is affected, if not by the actual framing of the language mentally, by that sense of contradiction which comes in. All these things creep into the mind or heart and have a tendency to deter or weaken in the matter of prayer, and we have to deal with these more fully as we go on. We must recognize that the modernism of our time does set aside the objective efficacy of prayer and only gives to it the place of a subjective value, that is, its salutary influence upon the one who prays in making a change of, perhaps, demeanour, or mind, or reason, by certain qualities of reverence and such like.

Before we take up some of these things more fully, let me say that there are two things to bear in mind always in petitional prayer. The first is the basic need of the other two aspects, communion and submission. For petitional prayer, in which, after all that I have said, we believe, and with which, after all, we shall go on, nevertheless the basic need is communion with the Lord so that prayer does not resolve itself into merely asking God for things, but comes out of a heart-fellowship with Him. And it needs submission, so that our petitions are not for our own ends or personal desires, but, having been brought by submission into line with the Divine will, are based upon oneness with the mind and will of God. You will find that I am only putting in another way what is made perfectly clear in the Word of God, namely: "If you shall ask anything according to His will." That is submission.

Then the other thing to bear in mind in petitional prayer is that, in view of all the mental difficulties which I have mentioned, it becomes pre-eminently an act of faith. It is these mental difficulties which very largely make petitional prayer an act of faith. Yes, argue if you will along all these lines, about the sovereignty of God, and predestination, and so on; nevertheless, we believe that God will change things. In spite of all the arguments which would undercut and weaken prayer, we are going on asking. That makes petitional prayer pre-eminently an act of faith. You may say that is a very cheap way of getting out of it. Well, we have not finished yet, but that is the conclusion at which we have to arrive. We do not want to get out of this cheaply.

Prayer as Co-operation

There are yet two other aspects of prayer, one of which we will deal with in this chapter, and the other we will leave for later.

The fourth aspect is co-operation, and this is the governing object of prayer. It gets behind everything else and will set us right as to praying and to prayer in all its aspects. Communion, submission, petition and conflict are all adjusted and set right when we recognize that prayer is co-operation, for all these other aspects and phases of prayer are for co-operation. Co-operation is the motive, the truth, the life, the liberty, the power and the glory of prayer. The motive of prayer is co-operation with God. What prayer is in truth is cooperation with God. To have life in prayer we have to recognize that it is co-operation with God, and we get life when prayer is entered into as co-operation with God. If we are not in co-operation with God we may be sure that we shall have no life in prayer. If we are really cooperating with God we shall know we have life in prayer.

Liberty in prayer comes along the line of co-operation with God, and it is not until we get that adjustment, that coming into line with God's purpose, that we 'get through,' as we say. Immediately we get into line with the purpose of God and actively co-operate, then we get movement and there is liberty.

In the same way the power of prayer is related to co-operation with God. Co-operation with God is power in prayer. Think of Elijah, and others, coming into co-operation with God and the resulting effectiveness of their prayer. What is accomplished!

And then the glory of prayer. Prayer becomes a glorious thing when it is really intelligently and spiritually a matter of co-operation with God. Co-operation eliminates selfishness and everything that is merely personal. That is one of its chief values, for it means that prayer should bring us into the Divine plan, the Divine method, the Divine time and the Divine spirit, or disposition. All these things are important - not only to know the plan, but God's method of fulfilling His plan; not only to know the plan and the method, but to come into God's time; and then, not only to be on that executive side, but to be in a right spirit for the thing when the time has come, to do it in the Spirit, in the demeanor of the Lord. All that is co-operation. We may be in a right thing, in a right way, at a right time, and yet not be helping the Lord because we are in a wrong spirit that is not the spirit of the Lord. Prayer in co-operation with God is to make adjustment in all these matters.

There are three factors which are essential to prayer. Firstly, desire; secondly, faith; and thirdly, volition, or will. I just make that statement and leave it as it is.

Then when we put together communion, submission and petition we have co-operation. When they go together and are adjusted to each other, in line with each other and with the Divine will, then you have co-operation.

Perhaps, in closing that phase of things, we might remind ourselves that very often the Lord calls for an initial exercise on our part before He comes in on His side. He very often requires an initiative from us in the matter of desire, of faith and of volition. It is like the drop of water that has to be put into the old-fashioned pump to produce the stream, and you do not get the flow until you have given the pump something. And the Lord just calls for that on our part which may be, in comparison, a very little, but which makes it

possible for Him to come out in His fullness. Very often prayer at its commencement represents exercise of will, faith and desire on our part, and then the Lord responds to that. It may be that the Lord does not respond until He sees the desire put into faith's deliberate action of the will to get through to Him. There is very often a good deal of discouragement met with at the commencement of prayer, and the danger is that we should give up too soon because we do not seem to be getting anywhere. The Lord is just asking for that drop of water to start the flow!

So far we have only mentioned four aspects of prayer, and have referred to some of the difficulties which arise in connection with them, but we have not cleared up those difficulties. We shall give two whole chapters to the fifth aspect of prayer, and then proceed to deal at greater length with the difficulties by way of seeking to answer them. These difficulties, however, are really only in the realm of the mind, and while they may sometimes get in the way of faith, faith will triumph over them, and leave behind a history of mighty things in spite of them.

Chapter 2 - Prayer as Warfare

Reading: Nehemiah 4:9, 17, 20; Ephesians 6:18

The Christian life has very often been likened to a warfare, and the appeal has been made to 'come and join the ranks and enter into the battle of the Lord.' But there is an irregularity about such an appeal, because, while it is true that there is such a warfare and such a militant company, the real consciousness of the fight, the battle, the warfare, does not exist until we are saved and are 'on the Lord's side.' The unconverted do not know anything about this battle. For them it is something merely reported and spoken about, something objective - outside of themselves and something about which they have altogether confused and wrong ideas. It is not until we are really in Christ that we either know the reality of the battle or understand its true nature.

But it is not just the warfare of the Christian life in the general and ordinary sense with which we are concerned here at this time. It is that warfare which is especially connected with, and related to, the full testimony of the Lord Jesus. The general conception of Christian warfare is that which has to do with evils, wrongs, vices, the things in this world, and human conditions which ought to be otherwise, and it is there that the mistaken apprehension of unconverted men and women is found. They think that to enter into the Christian army means to go out to battle with the evils, the wrongs, and the vices which abound in this world. But when you really come into touch with the full testimony of the Lord Jesus you very soon develop another consciousness: that it is not merely evils, wrongs and sins that you are having to deal with, but spiritual forces - intelligent, cunning, artful, venomous, malicious forces - which are at the back of everything else. It is that warfare with which we are concerned just now, that which is related to the full testimony of the Lord Jesus, to His absolute and perfect sovereignty and lordship in this universe, and that warfare is not with things but with spiritual persons, headed by a great spiritual personage, the evil one.

Spiritual Conflict Implies a Spiritual Position

This warfare is related to a position. It is a consciousness which only comes to us in a certain realm. You may be a Christian, and as a Christian you may realize that you are up against adversities, difficulties, oppositions, and things which make the Christian life strenuous and full of conflict, calling out all the militant features of life, and yet you may not have entered into the ultimate things of the testimony of the Lord Jesus and the ultimate realm of the battle of the saints. But if you come as a believer to a revelation of the fullness of Christ in His personal sovereignty and lordship, in the greatness of the work of His cross in every realm, and then into the light of the Church which is His Body, you enter immediately into a new realm of conflict, the battle changes its character, and you begin to develop a consciousness, or a consciousness begins to grow in you, that you are up against something far more sinister, far more intelligently evil than those wrongs that abound in the world. You become increasingly conscious that it is with the devil, directly and nakedly, and with his forces that you are having to do.

But that consciousness is bound up with a specific position, and the experience of believers is that as they go on with the Lord (which means going upward, away from the

earthlies to the heavenlies, more and more away from the old creation to the new creation life, and more and more away from the flesh to the spirit) the more closely do they come into contact with the ultimate spiritual forces of the universe, and the conflict assumes new forms and the warfare takes a new character. It is a warfare linked up with a specific position to which the believer comes, and with the consciousness which comes in only in a certain realm. It is in a fuller measure a spiritual warfare, and being that, it pre-supposes a spiritual state on the part of the believer.

To put that in another way: the more spiritual we become, the more spiritual does the warfare become; and the more spiritual the warfare is in our consciousness and in our knowledge, so we may realize that we have become more spiritual. When we are carnal our warfare is carnal, and I refer to believers and not to unbelievers. The unbeliever is not spoken of as carnal. He is natural. When we are carnal as believers, our warfare and our weapons are carnal. That is, we meet men on their own level and answer back their challenge with that with which they challenge us. If they come out in argument we counter with argument; if they come out with reason we meet them with reason; if they come out with fierce temper we meet them in the heat of the flesh; and if they come out to us with criticism, well, we give them what they give us and try to go one better, meeting them always on their own level.

That is carnal warfare, using carnal weapons. When we cease to be carnal and leave all carnal ground, becoming wholly spiritual, we find ourselves in a new realm at the back of men, dealing with spiritual forces directly and not with merely carnal forces. We have come into touch with something at the back of carnal man, and the carnal man is utterly helpless in the presence of a spiritual man for the simple reason that he cannot get the spiritual man to come down to his level. Therefore he is disarmed, and sooner or later he will have to recognize that that spiritual man is his superior. But the superiority is not just in that the spiritual man is on a new level. It is that he is meeting not the man naturally, but the forces behind the man. It is spiritual warfare now. We cease to fight after the flesh; we cease to fight man; we cease to battle with flesh; our warfare is in another realm altogether. That represents spiritual advance, spiritual growth, and it represents spirituality. And when we come into real spiritual warfare a spiritual state is pre-supposed. In that realm the natural man's resources are utterly useless. They are ruled out, because for that warfare only spiritual equipment is either permissible or effective. The warfare then is with spiritual weapons, spiritual resources and spiritual equipment. So Ephesians 6 finds us in the heavenlies, battling, not with flesh and blood, but with principalities and powers, but we are equipped with a spiritual armour, the armour of God.

The Prayer-life - the Objective of the Enemy

That is all preliminary. What we are coming to immediately as the thing of basic importance for us, having seen the nature of our warfare, is that the battlefield of this warfare is prayer. When the Apostle Paul has shown us the whole panoply of God, the armour in all its parts, and exhorted us to take it up and to stand, and withstand, he, as it were, spreads the ground under our feet and says: "With all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints." The battleground of this warfare is prayer. What I mean is this: that this battle is won on

the ground of prayer, these forces are dealt with and defeated on the ground of prayer, and, that being so, the chief objective of the enemy is the prayer-life of the believer. That is the focal point of all the enemy's attention and strategy.

Now if we said no more than that, that is the supreme thing for our grasping and for our recognition. We have said the most important thing that can be said in this connection. The focal point of all the enemy's attention and strategy is the prayer-life of the believer. If he can destroy that by any means he has gained the day, defeated the saints and frustrated the ends of God. The enemy fights prayer persistently, energetically, violently and cunningly, and he fights the prayer-life of the believer. He fights it in various ways. First of all, he fights it along preventive lines, in the direction of prevention, and there has to be a tremendous battle and conflict to *get* prayer - not only to pray, but to have prayer, get prayer - and there is nothing in all the range of his wit, his cunning, his craftiness, his ingenuity and his resourcefulness that the enemy will not employ to prevent real spiritual prayer. I think it will probably be enough for us if we concentrate upon that just now.

The Battle for Prayer

I am quite sure that I have the agreement of most of the Lord's people when I say that one of the most difficult things, if not *the* most difficult thing, is to be able to get to prayer and give ourselves to prayer. When we contemplate prayer we meet a host of unsuspected and unforeseen difficulties which suddenly rise up as ambush forces breaking out upon us. Anything to prevent prayer! I am not saying something that you do not know, but I am saying it in order that you may recognize it clearly, definitely and deliberately, and face the fact that it is not just ordinary circumstances, but a designed, well-laid scheme of the enemy to prevent prayer. The enemy, instead of objecting, will promote occupation with a thousand and one things for the Lord if thereby he can crowd out prayer. He does not mind how busy we are in the Lord's work, nor how often we are found preaching, conducting meetings, and doing the many-sided work of the Lord, as we may call it. He knows quite well that all the work for the Lord which is not founded upon triumphant spiritual prayer will count for little or nothing in the long run and will break down. I say that he does not mind you working. Work for the Lord as hard as you can, but if you leave out prayer you will not accomplish very much. One of the subtleties of the enemy is to get us so busy, so occupied, so much on the go and on the rush with - as we think - things for the Lord and the work of the Lord that our prayer is cramped and pushed up into a corner and limited, if not almost entirely ruled out; and the Lord will never accept the excuse: 'Lord, I am too much engaged in Your interests to pray.' The Lord never favours an attitude like that.

You will remember that when the children of Israel began to talk about and contemplate their exodus from Egypt, the enemy's reaction was to double their labours, that is, to get them so much more deeply occupied with work that there would be no more time for contemplating an exodus. Immediately you begin to contemplate or purpose a fuller prayer-life, the enemy launches a new scheme for keeping you more busy and occupied, heaping up the work and crowding in demands so that you will have no time or opportunity for prayer.

I think that we must face this quite definitely. Of course, there are all the arguments about duty, obligation and responsibility, and it does sometimes look as though to put some things aside for prayer would be neglecting duty, or failing in obligation, or breaking down in responsibility, but there is a place where we have to cast those matters upon the Lord, and pray.

Now, of course, it is very difficult to apply that. There are always dangers about saying a thing like that, because there are always people who are more than ready to let go of their responsibilities, or who do not take their responsibilities seriously. They would be only too ready and glad to hand over their domestic affairs to someone else while they cultivate a devotional life. The Lord must safeguard this word. But we must recognize this: that the enemy will construct his best arguments about responsibility, duty and conscience to stop us praying, and there is a place where, if we see prayer is utterly ruled out, or brought down to such a limited place that it is completely inadequate for a life of spiritual ascendancy and victory, we have to say: 'Lord, I am going to trust the responsibility with You while I pray, that You will not allow my breaking away for this time to have detrimental results, and that You will protect this prayer-time - which I seek for Your glory - from the inroads of the enemy.'

The principle of the tithe does work, even in this realm. Give God His portion, His place, and you will find that when you have given the Lord His one-tenth, you are able to do more with the nine-tenths than you could do with ten-tenths. That principle works. But there is a battle *for* prayer, and the necessity is for a strong, a mighty, a deliberate and a determined stand in Christ, by the victory of His cross, to get prayer, to bring in the full weight and the value of the victory of the cross of the Lord Jesus to secure prayer and to drive the enemy off the ground of prayer so that that ground may be held for prayer. It is like Shammah of old, when he stood in the lentil patch with his sword in his hand and, singlehanded, fought the Philistines and preserved that lentil patch, and the Lord wrought a great victory. The lentil patch may represent our prayer-ground, which has to be defended against the enemy in the fullness of Calvary's victory. There is a fight to get prayer and a battle for prayer. We have, I am afraid, too often accepted the situation that it is not possible to pray just now, or things are such as to make it quite out of the question to pray. Yes, they will be if the devil has his way; they will be always such as to make prayer out of the question. That is one of his tactics. We have to clear the ground for prayer in the victory of His Name and of His Cross. The Cross is just as effectual in securing time for prayer, if we will apply it and use it, as it is in any other realm.

But we have to approach prayer on victory-ground. We have to take up this attitude, and we shall find it more and more necessary to do so: 'Now prayer must be. Everything makes it impossible on the human side, but, Lord, I claim in the victory of Calvary a time of prayer, a clear space for prayer.' We have to stand in that victory, and it may mean *standing* before we get through. It is not only the many things that may press in upon us along the line of external circumstances and happenings, to leave no room for a time of prayer. How true it is that when we are actually down on our knees prayer is withstood! It may be nothing on the outside. There may be no doorbells ringing, no telephone going, nor callers coming. We may be shut up in the silence of our own room and be actually on our knees, and then a mighty interfering activity commences. It may be physical. We may suddenly develop a physical consciousness that was not there a little

while before, and it will threaten the whole of our prayer-time, so that we find that bodily we have to take up a tremendous burden, a deadweight. We may even develop positive symptoms of illness of which we were unconscious before. These are facts. And then mental conditions may come in just at that time which were not there before. Oh, immediately, what an inrush of a thousand and one things which have not bothered us up till that moment! The mind becomes occupied by way of reflection and with things we must not forget which have not troubled us until that moment. And what about that sense of numbness, coldness, distance and unreality that descends upon you at such times? If you pray audibly your voice sounds strange and far away, and you seem to be talking into the air. All these things, and many others, come when we purpose prayer. They come on the very threshold, and for a time we meet all manner of discouragements and set-backs to prayer, and if we take the first five, ten or even fifteen minutes as our criterion, we will give it up, close down, get up and get on with something else.

Yes, the enemy is out to prevent prayer, and there is a phase of the battle which has to be gone through in order to get prayer. Again I say, this is nothing strange or foreign to you - unless, of course, you have not had a prayer-life at all, or are one who has never seriously taken up the business of prayer. But I am not saying all this to inform you. I am saying it to you and to myself in order that we may recognize that this is a thing which calls us into battle. It is the warfare of the saints to *get to prayer*, and not only to pray through. There is this aspect of the enemy's activity which is to prevent prayer, and to obtain it is a battle. There has to be a standing, a taking up of a position, and a withstanding in prayer for prayer.

I trust that the saying of all this which is so true to your experiences will nevertheless have the desired effect of making you recognize that in the future your prayer-life is not going to develop if the enemy can prevent it, and if you are going to have it and it is going to develop, then you will have to stand for it. It will not just come. You will not find that you just drift into it. You will never find that you drift into a mighty prayer-life, or that you walk with ease into such a thing. You will find that there is some making and breaking, some conflict and some battle to get it, that every realm of things will be taken hold of by the enemy to prevent it, and all that he has at his command of supernature will be used. You and I, dear friends, have to fight for our prayer-life, and the more we advance with the Lord spiritually, the more we shall find that to be so. It is not that the enemy is out to stop you and me from having a personal prayer-life. That is not what he is against. It is the testimony of the Lord Jesus which is so closely bound up with the prayer-life of the Lord's people that he is out to destroy. You and I, as individuals, as human beings, do not mean anything to the enemy. It is that which is bound up with us, and with which we are bound up in Christ - His sovereignty and His glory.

What Is Involved in Prayer

Now does it occur to you, or even strike you with considerable force, that this resistance to prayer-life on the part of the enemy implies - or more than that, it positively declares and proclaims - that the Lord's glory and honour, His Name and His testimony are preeminently secured by prayer? If that is the focal point of the enemy's activity, then it means that the Lord's highest interests are served by prayer. That puts prayer in the

first place. That, again, is not new to you, and yet it is a further emphasis upon the fact that the enemy is always trying to get prayer into the last place. He will try to get anything else in relation to the Lord before prayer, and get prayer in the last place. And it does not matter how you put it, or what you say to Christian people about this, you cannot get it home to them. 'Oh, it is only the prayer meeting tonight!' On Sunday night, when there is ministry of the Word and preaching, you will have a large gathering, but on prayer meeting night you go into a side hall which will be perhaps a little more than half full. And yet on Sunday night you have said that our main ministry is prayer and everything goes if our prayer-life fails! You may say anything you like along that line, emphasize it and stress it, but it does not make any difference. I must confess that I am often bewildered by the fact that so many really spiritual people - for so I give them credit for being - will crowd to preaching meetings and conferences, but they are rarely seen at a prayer meeting and leave so few to do the praying in the corporate prayer-life of the assembly.

Yes, it is just like that, as though listening to an address were the first and primary thing, and as though getting Bible teaching and truth were more than anything else. No, dear friends! Not at all! All that can only become vital, living and effective in so far as our prayer-life, individually and corporately, is maintained in strength and given the first place. So suffer whatever there might be of correction in the word, for it is true, is it not? Oh, we have all been guilty. We all have to say to ourselves: 'Thou art the man!' We do need so much to get the Lord's estimate of the value of prayer, and if you go through the Word you will find that He estimates prayer at a higher value than anything else in His people. Look at His own life! Oh, amazement of amazement, that One such as the Son of God, in all that He was, should yet maintain such a prayer-life! "A great while before day," or "continued all night." Yes, He prayed!

And has it occurred to you that some of the most glorious unveilings of truth that we have in the Bible came in prayers? Read those prayers of Paul in Ephesians and Colossians! "For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father...", and then he goes on and gives you his prayer, and in that prayer you have a revelation which is matchless. It has come in prayer, so that your teaching is based upon the prayer-life of a man. Your light, in its true value, comes out of prayer, and there is no light of real value that is not born of prayer. All the value of truth depends upon the prayer which is behind it, so that our conferences, our meetings, our addresses, and all the truth that comes just remain so much negative matter if there is not a commensurate prayer-life on our part in relation to it. We have to pray it in and pray it out, and I feel that after a conference the thing to do is to get to prayer more than ever on the ground of what has been said, and take that up before the Lord. If we did that, how much more fruit there would be from our conferences! Instead of having truth in our notebooks we would have it in our lives. Instead of so much more truth that we have now become acquainted with, we would be entering into the working power of that truth if we came back with it to the Lord in prayer. No one is more conscious of the need of having things said to him on this matter than I am at this time, but we are speaking together of these things and I trust that we are all taking them to heart. Oh, for the day when, not for the sake of numbers (for it is not a matter of counting heads) but because of the recognition of the pre-eminent place of prayer, the prayer meeting will be as crowded as any conference gathering! It only needs the apprehension of God's estimate of prayer, and we shall regard it as at least

as important as any conference meeting with a theme and an address. *The Lord burn that into our hearts, for that is the preeminent work - prayer.*

It is not a great deal that has been said, but it is very important, and let us remember the word in connection with the enemy's determination to prevent prayer. We shall go on to show you that if he cannot prevent it, he will try to interrupt it; and if he cannot interrupt it, he will try to destroy it afterwards. There are other aspects of this thing, but we have perhaps seen enough to get us into some very definite place in relation to our prayer-life in facing it in the Name of the Lord.

Chapter 3 - Prayer as Warfare (continued)

Reading: 1 Kings 18:30-32, 36-38, 42-45; James 5:17-18; Ephesians 6:18

We note that what is true of the enemy's activity along the line of prevention of prayer is also true along the line of interruption of prayer. I do not only mean that while you are praying you have interruptions, but he has a subtle way of interfering with the continuity of a prayer-life. You may triumphantly secure seasons of prayer for perhaps a week, or more, and then something is introduced which breaks into that continuity so that you lose it, and you find that after a time a tremendous battle has to be fought to recover that prayer-life. For many of us our history is that of a spasmodic prayer-life which comes in patches, a history fraught with the necessity for every now and then recovering lost ground through having a setback - the interruption of the enemy. So we have to set a watch there, and watch especially against reactions from intensive periods of prayer, slackening off and feeling that now, after that strenuous time, we can take a spiritual holiday. There is always a very great peril there, as David proved. At a time when kings went out to battle, he went up on to the housetop. Then what the enemy cannot prevent or interrupt, he will seek to destroy afterwards. That is, he will direct his attention to spoiling the prayer-life afterwards. We may have a strong time, or a series of strong times, but if he cannot directly attack our prayer-life, the enemy is always out to spoil it through another angle which does not seem immediately to be related to it, but by which indirectly we are crippled. Our prayer-life may be very strong, good and consistent, but something happens in some other department of our life, perhaps in a relationship somewhere else, and when we come to prayer we find that that thing represents a direct blow at our prayer-life and we cannot go on until that thing has been dealt with.

We must recognize that all these things are just the enemy's efforts, and are a highly organized scheme to destroy, either directly or indirectly, our prayer-life, or to interfere with it. Thus we shall find that our prayer-life is the focal point of everything.

It is when we come really to pray, to the real business of prayer, that we shall discover exactly where we are in all the relationships of our life. The iniquity which we regard in our hearts may not have anything to do directly with our prayer-life, but it comes indirectly as a terrific blow upon us. Things which may be side-shows bear right down upon our prayer-life. The enemy is always putting up these things all round to destroy our prayer-life. We register the state of things when we come to prayer. We may not recognize for the moment what a certain thing means, whatever that thing may be. It may be an interrupted fellowship, a strained relationship, a cross-purpose, or a breach somewhere, and we may not recognize exactly what it does mean until we come to take up our strong prayer-life. Then we find that that thing has struck at the very vitals of prayer and we cannot get on. That thing is out there, and so we are held up here; and then we discover that there has been a subtle working on the circumference of our lives which strikes at the very centre. The enemy would destroy our prayer-life, would, so to speak, throw things at it from the outside to make it impossible. I think you are able to follow what I mean, for experience bears it out.

The Universality of Prayer

Now we come to widen out a little in this spiritual conflict. These passages which we have read present us with a very comprehensive position. In 1 Kings 18 the account of the battle of Elijah on Carmel is undoubtedly an Old Testament illustration of the New Testament truth, especially of Ephesians 6. These two things go together as type and antitype, as part and counterpart, and what is common to them both is that the sphere of the conflict is the heavenlies. What James says directs the whole of this matter to the heavens: the opening and closing of the heavens, the government of the heavens, the ruling of the heavens. The heavens are the main object in view here, and this conflict relates to the heavens and the heavenlies: "Our wrestling is... in the heavenlies." Elijah's conflict was in a very real way a conflict in the heavens where heavenly forces were involved. That, I think, is patent, and that is a common feature in these two portions of the Word.

This particular spiritual conflict in which you and I are found when we have come into God's full purpose and testimony in Christ is, in its ultimate issue, related to the government of the heavens. Who is going to govern in the heavens? There are the principalities, the powers, the world-rulers of this darkness and the spiritual hosts of wickedness who have assumed the place of government. They are in a usurped place, for that is not the eternal thought of God, nor is it His will. Christ is Head, and His Church as His members are, in the intention of God, called to rule in the heavens, to govern as from the heavens. It is a question of what the heavens are in this matter, whether they are to be satanic, or whether they are to be the expression of the absolute lordship of the Lord Jesus in and through the Church, which is His Body. It is the heavenlies, the ruling realities, which are involved, and it is there that our conflict is. That is the sphere of this warfare, and our prayer-life has to do with that. It is not merely to do with the incidents of our lives here on the earth. Oh, that the Lord's people would recognize the immensity of this, for so often the generality of our prayer is in the realm of merely trivial things, and a great deal of time is taken up with telling the Lord all about the little things of our ordinary earthly life which, while they may be important to us and may count in an earthly life, do not touch the ultimate things in God's purpose.

There is such a difference between praying down there and praying against the immense forces of the universe and getting the heavenly things through. The Lord's people want to be lifted in prayer to where the mighty, heavenly, eternal and universal are affected, touched and brought through. There is a great need for us to be brought into our heavenly place in the matter of prayer, where real spiritual matters lying behind the other are touched. Very often the Lord never allows our prayers to be effective in the merely earthly details of our lives because He wants us to see that there is something behind those things which matters a great deal more. You sometimes pray for a thing to happen, a change to take place, or an event to come off, but nothing happens. The Lord seeks - after you have extended yourself as fully as you can on the matter - to show you that there is a spiritual key to that situation, and He cannot do just the earthly thing for you because that would not in any way be to your spiritual increase of intelligence, understanding, knowledge or value, and would only be doing things because you asked Him. He is trying to instruct and teach you so that you come into possession of spiritual situations.

Well, it is the heavens which are the sphere of this conflict.

The Church - the Occasion of the Conflict

What is the occasion of the conflict? What is it for? Well, from the context in both these passages, 1 Kings 18 and Ephesians 6, you see that the occasion of the conflict is the Church. The Church is the immediate object in view. In 1 Kings 18, of course, it is the people of God, and the issue of Elijah's prayer is that their hearts should be turned back. The Lord's people are in view and his prayer is for this people, so he brings them all near and involves them in this issue, and associates them with it, because it is their issue. We know that the thing which is in view right through the letter to the Ephesians is the Church which is His Body, and this is the occasion of the conflict. It is a battle in the heavenlies in relation to the Church, the Body of Christ.

There are two things to be said about that. One, that it is not merely a personal matter, but a collective, corporate matter. This conflict relates to the whole Body of Christ, and the conflict of every individual is a related conflict, relating to all the rest of the saints, so that there is that spiritual relativity which means that if one member is defeated the whole Body suffers spiritually. It may not know why, nor be conscious of its particular suffering, but, registered in the Head and the consciousness of the Head, there is a loss to the whole Body when even one member falls into defeat. The conflict is a related one; and so the enemy seeks to isolate individual members of the Body and bring such pressure upon them as to crush them down, because he knows - not just the value of an isolated member - but the relativity of every member. It is because of this that there is so much spiritual emphasis from the intelligence of the Holy Spirit upon the necessity for praying for all saints, for the fellowship prayer, the corporate prayer of the Lord's people. There is loss to Christ, the Head, if there is not that prayer for all saints.

Christ in Glory - the Object of the Conflict

The other thing to be said about this is that it is not even the Church as the Body which is the ultimate thing, although it is the immediate occasion. We must not put the Church, the Body of Christ, in the pre-eminent place. It is an occasion, but it is not the final thing. The Church, the Body of Christ, is His instrument, His vessel for His testimony. His testimony is deposited in the Body. It was so in His resurrection, and at Pentecost the testimony of His victory, the testimony of His exaltation, the testimony of His glorification and the testimony of His universal authority in heaven and in earth was deposited in the Church. As the temple in the Old Testament was the shrine of the glory of God, so the Body of Christ in the New Testament is the shrine of His glory, His testimony and His Name, and it is ultimately to strike at that glory, that Name, and that exaltation that the enemy directs his attention to the elect vessel, the Church, the Body of Christ. And so the Church becomes the occasion of the conflict, although not the end, but the enemy gets at the Christ, at the Name and at the glory through the Body. We know that that was true in the Old Testament.

When Israel was in a state of declension the Lord's glory and honour, His Name, and His majesty were over-shadowed, beclouded, and lost to view. When Israel's spiritual life was in the ascendant, then Jehovah's testimony was maintained in full strength. In the New Testament, and in our own time in this New Testament age, the enemy's way

of dishonouring the Lord is by destroying the spiritual life of the Lord's people, or by breaking up the fellowship of the saints.

So the Church, the Body, becomes the occasion of the conflict because of what it is in its divinely-appointed vocation, purpose and object. The enemy's bitter hatred and violent opposition are directed against the corporate life of the Lord's people. He will seek by any means to destroy that, to break up the fellowship of the saints, to set the Lord's people against one another, and to introduce disintegrating things - but, oh, how subtle are his ways in this!

The Strategic Value of Watchfulness

Here I do feel, dear friends, that you and I will have to do what Nehemiah did, and what the Apostle in this very portion exhorts us to do: "Set a watch"; "watching thereunto," because, as you notice in both connections, it is the wiles of the devil which are in view. They are the subtle activities of the enemy, and to set a watch against the wiles of the devil in practical outworking will, at least in one direction, mean this: that we make *quite sure* that the rumours which we hear and the reports that come to us are absolutely trustworthy. We must make quite sure - "prove all things". We can be divided by a rumour, and split up by a report. We can be set at variance or apart by a mere insinuation. In these days, when the atmosphere is surcharged with fear and suspicion, you have only to hint at the possibility of someone being 'unsound' and a spiritual breach of fellowship is created and a gap made. If only we set a watch and made sure, we would find that a great deal of that was unnecessary and unwarranted, and represented a great loss to the Lord Himself and to His people, for when we get really to close grips and sift these things we find there is nothing in them, or, if there is anything in them, they have an explanation and we cannot fail, in all honesty of heart, to accept that as being right. That is very often how it works out.

But, oh! to set a watch against these wiles of the devil! His methods of breaking up the corporate life of the Lord's people are beyond our power to enumerate, and that is where prayer and watching are necessary. Prayer should result in intelligence about the wiles of the enemy, and 'watching unto prayer' is watching and praying that you might discover in prayer what it is the enemy is after and how he is working.

We do not want to be obsessed with the enemy, always to have our eyes on him, but we must recognize the facts as they are, and those facts are that throughout these almost two millenniums the enemy has made it his great business unceasingly to destroy the fellowship of the people of God. Is that true? Is that history? If it is true, what does it signify? That you can never have something that really in any measure represents what is precious to the Lord, something of a spiritual character, embodying some precious element of His testimony, but what it is the object of satanic malignity and cunning which has the one intention of splitting that thing, breaking it up, and getting schism and division there somehow, by truth or by lies. That is history, and surely it gives the whole game away, that a Church in fellowship, a Body rightly adjusted and related, moving together in the will of God, is the greatest menace to the spiritual rule of principalities and powers that there is in the universe.

So it is that to which we should work and direct our attention. Let us lay ourselves out for spiritual fellowship! That does not mean compromising with things which are contrary to the Word of God, and must not mean coming down from any spiritual position to which the Lord has, through cost, brought us. We must be where Nehemiah was when his enemies said, 'Come down and let us discuss this matter. We must confer about this.' Nehemiah said: "I am doing a great work so that I cannot come down." There must be no coming down to discuss things that are beyond the point of discussion as to spiritual necessity. But, dear friends, any spiritual position arrived at through cost and the deep in-working of the cross must be held only in relation to all the saints. It must not be held out of relation to the saints, nor must those who have it and hold it be made something apart from the rest. No! Whatever may be the difference of spiritual position so far as degree is concerned, fellowship with all saints must be striven after and maintained as far as possible, and it must be reached out for. I do want to urge that upon you more and more, as it is urged upon my own heart, because the Lord's end in giving light and truth may be defeated if the reception of it and the holding of it constitutes those who have it as being something apart from the rest of the saints. He has given it for the Body; if it is held apart, then the end for which He gave it has been missed. Lay that to heart very definitely!

So the occasion of the conflict is the Church, by reason of its heavenly calling and vocation. This is no personal thing, nor local thing: it is universal. The Body of Christ is a universal reality.

The Basis of Victory

Just a word or two with regard to the basis of victory in this conflict. The basis of victory here in 1 Kings 18 was undoubtedly the altar, and in Ephesians it is the same. Before you reach your position in the heavenlies for heavenly conflict and triumph, you have to pass through the earlier chapters of Ephesians and recognize that a death has taken place, that an altar was there, and that, having died, you have been 'quicken and raised together.' All the features of the cross, the altar, are implied at the beginning of the letter to the Ephesians, so that both in the representation and in that which is represented the basis of victory is the cross, the altar. Elijah took twelve stones, and the constitution of the altar with twelve stones immediately brings in the administrative feature in relation to the altar, for twelve is the number of administration. The altar comprised of twelve stones becomes the administrative instrument, the governmental principle, in this conflict in the hands of God. The government is in the cross, and by the cross, for by His cross He triumphed, and in His cross He stripped off principalities and powers and 'made a show of them openly.' I wonder if, in reading those fragments of 1 Kings 18 you were struck with the terms: "...according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Jacob, unto whom the word of the Lord came, saying, Israel shall be thy name." What is that? Well, Israel means 'a prince with God,' so in that verse 31 we have sons of a prince with God represented in the altar, in the cross.

Symbolically that speaks to us very clearly of that basis of our coming into our Prince, our governmental position in Christ, Who is the Prince with God. He is greater than Israel, for He is *the* Prince with God, and we are sons in Him and partake of His princeliness. That brings us up into a place of governmental authority in Christ in the

heavenlies, but it is all bound up with the altar, the cross. The cross is the basis of victory, and that is borne out again, not only by the testimony of heaven, the Word of God, but by the testimony of hell. Satan is an unwonted, unwilling - and I sometimes wonder whether he is an unconscious - witness to the truth in this way, for it is perfectly clear that he hated the cross, and he tried in the first place to keep the Lord Jesus from it: "...this shall not be unto Thee. But He turned and said unto Peter, Get thee behind Me, Satan." This is Satan trying to keep the Lord Jesus from the cross, and then, having failed to keep Him from it, he tried to bring Him off the cross: "If Thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross." Those subtle suggestions! "...let Him now come down from the cross and we will believe Him." To be believed in by the world was what He had come for, but, no, the second method of the enemy did not succeed.

The enemy having failed along those lines, and the cross having been accomplished in spite of him, he will seek now to change and alter the preaching of the cross in order to make it of non-effect. He will get people to preach it, and in their very preaching of it make it void. That is extraordinarily subtle! It is as well to recognize how far the enemy will go. He will promote the preaching of the cross, and the cross preached by his instigation and under his influence is made non-effective. The Apostle tells us that in his first letter to the Corinthians, that the cross preached in the wisdom of men makes it of non-effect, or void. Men preaching the cross in their wisdom are simply taking the true meaning and power out of the cross. Oh, yes, you hear plenty about the way of the cross, but it is not His way of the cross. The very power of the cross is in its registration against the enemy and all his works, against sin as a principle, and against evil as a state, a nature. The power of the cross is taken out when you speak about the heroics of the cross, and about the way of the cross as, well, any man who denies himself and lays down his life for his country is in the same category as Jesus Christ, Who, after all, only laid down His life as any soldier has done. That is the cross in modernism.

Another thing which the enemy seeks to do in relation to the cross is to keep Christians in ignorance of its full meaning. It is a great day for the Lord, and a terrible day for the enemy, when a Christian breaks through into the revelation of the full meaning of Calvary. That day marks a new bit of history in the realm of conflict. You may meet a certain kind of opposition on the ground of the substitutionary work of the Lord Jesus, but, believe me, you will meet ten times more when you come on to the ground of the representative work of the Lord Jesus, and when you take up your place in identification with Christ in death, burial and resurrection in a spiritual way. Then begins a new history of conflict, of battle, and of satanic antagonism, but you have entered into a new realm and a new place, and you have new powers at your command. The enemy has lost his ground. Multitudes believe in the substitutionary work and rejoice in it, but they are still going on in the energy of the natural man, even as Christians. They do not represent a menace to the enemy in those higher ranges, but when the cross has been so accepted and planted in our lives that the natural life is set aside - "I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I that live, but Christ liveth in me" - then there is a new realm of meaning to the Lord and of meaning to the enemy, and therefore a new realm of conflict. The enemy is out to keep that side of the cross from Christians, and we have said before, and it is true, that very often you meet your opposition on that line more from Christians than from any others. It is a strange thing. Immediately you go on with the Lord into all the fullness of the meaning of Calvary you find your chief difficulty is in

the realm of Christians, and, as a rule, 'official' Christians. Leaders will not have it, and you find that your way is made infinitely more difficult. It is true that the enemy does hate the fullness of the cross, and he will seek by any means to destroy its value for believers, to hide its meaning from them, and if possible to get them to forsake the position and come down from it, or to persuade them not to accept it.

Well, surely that is his testimony to its value! He is a witness to its meaning. The cross, then, is the basis of victory, and the enemy knows it very well.

I am not going further than that now. We must take this, think about it and apply it, but remember this grand, conclusive thing: Satan is a defeated foe for all who are truly one with the cross of the Lord Jesus, because Calvary does represent his defeat, and, as we are planted into the death of Christ, so we stand with Him in that defeat of the enemy, in that victory of the Lord Jesus. So, however he may rage, storm, fight, afflict, press, worry, and harass, the fact remains that for those who are one with Christ in His cross, Satan is a defeated foe.

Chapter 4 - Some Mental Difficulties in Prayer

Having considered the five phases of prayer, namely, communion, submission, petition, co-operation and conflict, we shall now go on a little further to consider some of the problems which are related to prayer. As we have said, very often an undefined sense of contradiction or uncertainty in the background of our minds has the effect of crippling or paralyzing prayer, and we are sometimes hindered by certain mental difficulties which we have never seriously set ourselves to analyze or define. Our object now is to seek to define some of these things, to analyze them, and to nail them down, by way of clearing the ground for prayer in certainty and confidence.

Prayer and the Will of God

In this connection one of the primary difficulties in prayer arises in relation to the will of God. That, of course, is a very wide sphere of contemplation and consideration, and includes a very large number of different phases, aspects and points, but we shall seek to narrow it down, and as we go on we shall see a great deal more wrapped up in what we say.

As to the will of God, the basic question seems to me to be this: Is it absolute or is it relative? What we are dealing with is that question as to whether the will of God for us is absolute or relative. When it is put like that you may not be helped very much. It sounds very academic, but I will explain what I mean.

Does God permit things because they are His absolute will, or because He would draw us out by them to some position? In the latter case the will of God is relative and not absolute, that is, things do not represent what is absolutely the will of God, but He has permitted them for other purposes, and, therefore, they represent the relative will of God. Now you have your foundation and basis for a very comprehensive consideration of the will of God in relation to prayer. If we are dealing with the relative will of God, the issue will be either that those things, having fulfilled their purpose, are set aside and cease to have any place at all in the will of God, or they are allowed to remain but we are in a place of ascendancy over them and they become our servants. They are there, not because God in the fullness of His will and purpose wants them to be there, but because He sees they are things which are necessary to maintain us in a certain position. If we were perfect creatures the will of God would always be absolute. There would be no place for the relative will of God, for it would be unnecessary for Him to permit things to get us to new positions. But, being imperfect, fallen creatures, the will of God for us is more often relative than otherwise.

Conflict between Submission and Importunity

So the problem arises for us along the line of submission and importunity. Those two things seem to be antagonistic to one another, to represent conflict and contradiction. How can you reconcile importunity with submission? Does not importunity rule out submission? Does not submission rule out importunity? These seem mutually against each other, and yet that is not so. The problem which comes up in prayer is to keep on hammering at the door, to continue knocking, and yet to know submission. Does not

submission take the driving force out of your knocking? Does not the force of your knocking imply that you have not learned submission? It may not always be defined in that way in the mind, but it creeps in, remaining in the background, and very often tends to draw that positiveness, certainty and definiteness out of prayer so that you find yourself in a no-man's-land.

Well, that is a problem, and we have to settle it as definitely as we possibly can. The solving of that problem, I think, is along the line of recognizing that the moral element comes in, and God is largely concerned with moral elements and questions. There is something which has to be got over, or got through, in us, and that means that in the relative will of God there will be many things which are only allowed, or may even be sent by the Lord, with the object of, and for the purpose of, getting over certain things in us, or getting us through certain things in ourselves because moral factors are in view. (I am using the word 'moral' in its broadest sense now, and not in any narrow sense.) We must recognize that the new creation is a moral matter and is not complete so far as we are concerned. It is perfect and complete in itself, but it is not complete in us. The old creation still exists. It is objective and external to the new creation, but it has great influence which it exercises upon the new. Sin is not extinct for the believer, nor is the world as something which registers itself upon the believer. And you do not need me to tell you that the devil is not extinct for the believer! But right at the centre of that old creation is the new creation, which is a moral thing. But it is a moral thing - we may say - in its infancy, and all its moral elements and factors have to be developed to make us moral creatures, in the full sense of the word - that is, responsible creatures, intelligent creatures, and creatures with a new conscience, a new standard of values and a new recognition of principles. A whole new heavenly world has come in, and its knowledge and wisdom have to be possessed intelligently. Its secrets have to be known and its virtues have to be inwrought. By regeneration the Lord has not made us mere automatons or machines, to be acted upon from without, irrespective of our will, our feelings, our desires, our reason or our intelligence, to be carried hither and thither and caused to do things, or made to do things, without reference to ourselves. That is altogether contrary to Scriptures.

But what the Lord has constituted us is moral creatures after a new morality, a new heavenly system and an entirely new intelligence which is not the natural man. We have an entirely new system of judgments, values and appraisements, and in everything the Lord will now refer to us. He will call upon us to exercise ourselves in relation to the new creation impression, consciousness, conviction and intimation from within. Thus the new creation is a moral thing, but because the old creation is still circling and wrapping it round, the new creation will grow by conquest, by conflict, and by strenuous exercise to overcome by subjecting, triumphing over, and by deliberate, strenuous, devoted and persistent application. The renewed will, energized by the Holy Spirit, will not be mechanically operated but will be called to exercise itself in the Lord. Praying in the will of God does not mean that the Holy Spirit comes and holds your will and your volition and makes you say things without your intelligence. That is an entirely false realm. There is a good deal today where man's intelligence is swept on one side and he begins to flow out with all kinds of things that neither he nor anyone else can understand, but that is not the new creation. The Holy Spirit does not suspend the intelligence and understanding of anyone He uses in this way, but He calls upon the exercise of

understanding. 'I will pray with the spirit, and I will pray with the understanding also,' said the Apostle, and prayer in the Holy Spirit is not that we so abandon ourselves to Him that we lose all our own moral life (using that word again in the fullest sense).

Prayer as Educative

Seeing, then, that moral questions are pre-eminent in the Lord's mind where we are concerned, prayer becomes an education and a training. We speak of 'the school of prayer,' and that is a very right designation. Education and training are not the same thing. Education has to do with obtaining knowledge, and training has to do with moral worth in practical expression. Get that definition, for it is an important one. We speak of an 'educated person,' and we mean someone who knows a lot, but speak of a 'well-trained person' and we think of someone who is worth something in practical value. There are a lot of educated people who are perfectly useless. We are, therefore, drawn out in prayer, and the Lord sees to it that we are drawn out and extended in prayer, and that represents, on the one hand, the acquiring of spiritual knowledge. We do not get that unless we are drawn out in prayer. It is remarkable how, when there is a full extending in prayer, we learn things, we get secrets and come into knowledge of things. And then, on the other hand, that drawing out in prayer has the effect of training, bringing us into a moral position and on to a higher level morally. We will see what that means presently. Prayerless people will be both ignorant and weak, uneducated and untrained. They will not know God's mind nor be able to do according to His mind.

So we must recognize further that prayer is not merely individual advantage, but it is the prosecuting of a campaign. There is a Divine scheme of things to be entered into. Prayer is not merely for personal and subjective value. It is objective, collective and relative, even in the moral values which result from individual prayer.

The Nature of Importunity

Now we will seek to summarize things a little. There are three sides to importunate prayer - but do you see why importunity is demanded, is necessary and is right? And do you see that there is no contradiction between subjection and importunity? Subjection, as we pointed out earlier, is an active thing, a positive thing and not a passive thing. It is coming into line with the Divine mind; and then importunity follows for the development of moral features.

The Moral Excellencies of Christ Inwrought

As we have just said, there are three sides to importunate prayer. Firstly, there is the moral side, and that has its own two aspects. We spoke of the ingredients of the incense to be offered upon the golden altar, and we pointed out that these ingredients represented the moral virtues of Christ. On the one hand, these have to be apprehended and appropriated by faith, and that is one aspect of the moral side of importunate prayer: that faith deliberately, persistently, apprehends and appropriates the moral virtues and glories of the Lord Jesus. That is exercise, and it very often represents putting back the intrusion of those arguments which arise from our natural selves and which would discourage prayer. When we come into the presence of the Lord, we should certainly come in with a sense of our own unworthiness, emptiness and

weakness, but that is not the ground of our exercise, for that should be settled. Yet often positive, effectual prayer is interfered with, arrested and even checked by persistent obsession with our own sinfulness, weakness and helplessness, and there is a need for positive exercise over the moral virtues and excellencies of Christ in order that we should get them into both of our hands to get before God.

The enemy will thrust in convictions, condemnations and accusations in the presence of God, but we must with both hands lay hold of the excellencies of the Lord Jesus, and until we have done that we shall not get through to the throne, because we cannot get there apart from those excellencies. There has to be a deliberate refusal to take that condemnation on. We know of some whose prayer-life has become an almost far-off, impossible thing, because immediately they cut themselves off for prayer there is such an inrush of introspection, self-analysis, and consciousness of themselves and the wrong things about themselves that they never get through to anything positive at all.

On the one hand, then, there is faith's exercise, the persistence of faith in the appropriation of those ingredients, those excellencies and virtues of the Lord Jesus, to bring us through to God.

Then there is the other side of the moral factor: those excellencies and virtues have to be wrought in our own souls by the Holy Spirit. The Lord Jesus in the presence of God is the representative Man after God's own heart, but He is not only the representative Man, He is the Man from Whom all the members of the new creation in Christ are to take their character, and His full content of virtues and excellencies as perfect Man - and perfected Man - have to be distributed to all His members, so that they take their character from Him and become themselves partakers of His nature in their own souls. These virtues of Christ were tested virtues, tried virtues, proved virtues, and triumphant virtues, and they are now energetic virtues, and not merely passive. The Lord Jesus (may I say this reverently) has not been put in a museum as a model, the supreme specimen just to be looked at and to be admired, but there is generic force and reality in Him. He lives. He is not a model, or a statue. He is the living Christ Who imparts Himself, and is ministered by the Holy Spirit, to us, His members. His faith is not just something that has been rounded off, perfected and polished, something to be looked at as we look at a beautiful specimen. It is a faith by which we have to live. His patience is of the same character. We are called to be fellows and partakers in the patience of Christ. As we just mention these things you will have a lot of Scripture rushing into your mind: "Add to your faith...." Add, add, add - and these are virtues of Christ being added to us

We are called, says the Apostle, to be "partakers of Christ." So His faith, His patience, His devotion, His obedience, His suffering and His love have all been tested out, tried, proved, and are triumphant, but not as things apart from us but in relation to us. "He hath granted unto us His precious and exceeding great promises; that through these ye may become *partakers of the divine nature....*"

The moral side of importunate prayer, then, is that the virtues and excellencies of Christ are wrought in us. When importunity represents the demand for patience because God does not answer at once, today, tomorrow, for a week, a month, or a year, what is He doing? He is working into us the moral excellencies of His Son, a perfected and

triumphant faith, a perfected and triumphant patience, a perfected and triumphant devotion and an obedience to Him which has no foundation other than that He has required it. Prayer is a training school indeed! These virtues come by exercise. Let us remember that God has an end in view, and that our partnership with Christ to which we are called at length will be moral. It will have to do with character; hence the relative will of God. Sin is not God's absolute will, but He has permitted it. Ah, yes, *but the relationship is with our conquest*, and with the development of the new creation moral life. Suffering is not God's absolute will, but He has permitted it, and He does permit it. It is, therefore, His relative will, which means that His permission and His allowing is for a purpose. When that purpose is reached the suffering may go, or it may still be allowed to remain to keep us in a position, but the position for which it has been permitted has been reached so that the relative will of God has been done. And that applies to everything else. Circumstances, for instance. Many circumstances that come into our lives are not God's absolute will. A breakdown is not God's absolute will, but inasmuch as nothing can come to any child of His without His consent, it is His permissive will.

Spiritual Understanding Secured

Now that raises for us the whole question of seeking, in prayer, to know what God means by things. That is our education. Coming to know what God means by things through deep heart exercise and travail is our training. We have reached a higher standard of life. So the second thing in importunate prayer is knowledge. In the first place the moral life, and knowledge in the second place. There are those who put themselves wholly into God's hands, and they are led into strange experiences of apparent contradiction. There may be a clear sense of what the Lord wants to do, but the absolute impossibility of doing it! No way is open and all the doors are closed. Delay after delay! What is the Lord doing? The first effect should be to draw us out in prayer, fully extend us in importunity. We cannot let it go. We may decide that we will leave it all with the Lord, but we find ourselves coming back to it again and again, and the Lord will not allow us to be indifferent. Well, He is after fuller knowledge and understanding on our part. That is bound up with all the Lord's ways with us, and one thing, which, of course, we know in experience but which perhaps it will be as well for us to have more clearly defined in our minds, is that we cannot learn Divine principles, or obtain spiritual knowledge from books or lectures. They can only be known as they follow the process of generation. First of all there must be conception, which is an inward thing; then there must be formation, and then there must be travail leading to birth. It is a *life* process. We cannot learn Divine and spiritual things from manuals, not even the Bible. We can only learn what is in the Bible along the line of living experience. *The Bible is not a gramophone; it is a microphone.* What is the difference? A gramophone is a thing stored up in itself. A microphone is that which transmits something beyond. The Bible is not a gramophone. There has to come through our reading of the Word something from beyond for our understanding. We can have the gramophone kind of knowledge of the Bible, that is, we may know the Bible as a book through and through, we can have the most wonderful analyses and diagrams, and we may still remain - for all practical and spiritual purposes in a living way - very little use to the Lord.

But if we have a microphone apprehension of the Word, we have the Scriptures, yes, but, more than that, God speaks *through* the Scriptures to us and we have the living

thing. We have all, as children on the sea-shore, taken up shells and put them to our ears to hear the sea roaring. We have brought the shells home to the city, put them to our ears, and have still heard the sea roaring. Is that true? It is a childish delusion. We think when we are children and have the shell in a town that we hear the roaring of the sea, that the roaring of the sea is all stored up in that shell and we have only to put it to our ear and there it is - we hear it. That is a child's thought about that shell, but it is nothing of the kind. That shell is only acting like a funnel which is collecting the vibrations of the atmospheric sounds and causing us to hear what we would not hear with the naked ear. The shell is nothing but a transmitter of the larger thing.

The Word of God taken as a book is just like that shell. If we are in the Spirit it will bring to us the mind of the Lord, but, apart from the Holy Spirit's operation through it to us, it may be just like any other book and we may read it and get no more light from it than we get from any other book. The necessity is for spiritual knowledge, but many make the Bible just a manual.

Now what we are saying is that we cannot know Divine principles or obtain spiritual knowledge from books or from lectures. These principles only come to us along the line of life and experience. Something of a living character is done in us, a life is formed in us and developed, and then it brings us into travail for its full outworking. That is how we get spiritual knowledge. That comes in importunate prayer, and that is why God demands and makes importunate prayer necessary. We get to know spiritual things from the travail of our souls before God, in the long drawn-out experience of anguish. Very often hurry - in the long run - only means loss of time, and we have to come back to get fuller knowledge because we were in too great a hurry. The Lord has to bring many back and tie them up so that they cannot move, and keep them there in deep exercise for an extended period. Then they learn what in the mind of the Lord was indispensable. There are those who are made to know before they go out, but whether it is before you go, or in your having to come back, the same thing is in view with the Lord - that you should *know*.

So the Lord's delays are His times of drawing out in importunate prayer for the sake of spiritual knowledge.

Taking Responsibility in Prayer

Then, thirdly, there is the collective aspect. Nehemiah spoke of the prayer which he prayed day and night, but that prayer was relative, for it had to do with the Lord's people. Christ's prayers were of the same character. They were not just for Himself, but they were related to His own and were drawn out day and night for them. Paul's prayers were clearly of the same order: "...do not cease to pray for you"; "praying always with all prayer and supplication... for all saints." There is persistence and importunity, but it is a collective, relative thing. The woman who is in the back of our minds as we use the word 'importunate,' or 'importunity,' is the one who confronts the unjust judge, and she represents the Church. Christ's comment upon that word was: "And shall not God avenge His own elect, which cry day and night unto Him...."

What is the avenging of the saints of their adversary? Well, it is the great collective thing at the end, the great issue when the accuser of the brethren is cast down, the one who

accused them before God, day and night. The great Judge will avenge of the accuser, the harasser of the Church, and this has its collective aspect. The incident of the friend at midnight was again a relative thing, not merely a personal thing. The man got up because his friend would keep on knocking. The man was fetched out of bed by his friend's importunity, but it was in relation to others. All this represents a scheme, a plan, a campaign, in which all the Lord's people are involved. God is not only getting us individually to a place, but He is getting us relatedly to a place with all His people: "till we *all* come..." Our travail, our moral training, these contradictions and delays which draw us out and extend us fully are working in us in relation to the whole Body. It becomes a relative thing, for it is on behalf of the Body.

The Lord is seeking to have His whole Body perfected, and every part must have a due working in it in relation to the whole. One day the cumulative effect of our trials, difficulties and perplexities will be seen in the whole perfect Body, and we shall see then that when we suffered we did not suffer in isolation, that our sufferings were not detached things but collective, related, a part of the whole, and they contributed to a much bigger thing than our own personal interests. We must allow God's full end to give colour to our personal experience. That which we go through is not simply because the Lord has marked us out to be sufferers alone, but because the whole Body is His end and we suffer in relation to the Body. For the Body's sake we fill up that which is lacking of the sufferings of Christ. The sufferings are relative, you see. They are not the absolute will of God, but relative in this further sense that they are moving on to a larger purpose of God. When that larger purpose is reached then that relative will of God in the sufferings will go, and there will be no more pain and no more suffering. We must see the whole plan of God and find that our required, demanded persistence and importunity in prayer affects these three things. The personal moral life of the believer on the heavenly pattern, and the increase of spiritual knowledge are behind the delays which call us out to importunate prayer. There is something that we are going to know that we do not know now. We are going to learn something that we know nothing about, and this drawing of us out is the way by which we come to know what we do not know.

This exercise, this travail, is related to the whole purpose of God and has its place in relation to all His saints. There is no such thing as coercion in God's will. That is foreign to the thought of importunity. Importunity is - although it may not seem like it - co-operation with God. We may think that the effect of it is to coerce God and persuade Him to do things, but God has only drawn us into that way to draw us into cooperation with His will. That is what I meant when I said there were things to be overcome in us, and all kinds of old creation things that have to be got over - our desires, our feelings, our preferences, our judgments, our conceptions, our estimates. In the exercise, activity and travail of prayer we have come into co-operation with God, and we have found that in the long run what we thought was trying to persuade the Lord to do things was His way of getting us to a place where He could do what He wanted. The Lord has strange ways, but in the end He is justified and "Wisdom is justified of her children".

Chapter 5 - The Sword of the Word, and Prayer

Reading: Judges 7:1-7; 1 Samuel 13:2-7, 19-23; Ephesians 6:17-18

As we come to the end of our meditations on prayer there are just one or two further things that need to be said, and these are largely connected with the passages of Scripture given above.

Gathering up the content of chapters 13 and 14 of the First Book of Samuel, the situation is just this: Saul, who officially represents the people, is in a state where faith in God is almost a minus quantity. The result is the domination of fear, and everywhere there is trembling and a tragic absence of cohesion and oneness. The enemy is in the ascendant. The people are unable to do anything because, by a strategic move of the enemy, all the weapons of war have been removed and the forges have been destroyed. In the midst of such a situation there is one man at least who has faith in God, and whose faith sets him in positive opposition to the prevailing conditions. Jonathan still believes profoundly in God, and, therefore, not only denounces the existing state of things, but repudiates it by setting himself positively and actively against it. Thus he becomes God's small instrument for the overthrow of the enemy's power in a day of almost universal declension. He raises a testimony in the midst of very general spiritual weakness and apprehension. Such instances are found scattered through the Scriptures, and through the history of the Church since Bible times. There are two things which are significant and especially to be noted in this story. One is:

The Strategy of the Enemy

This strategy meant that the Lord's people were virtually defeated before there was any battle. Their weapons had been confiscated and the means for producing more had been removed and destroyed.

That was a wily move, and truly one of the master-wiles of the enemy. Can we not see that in this incident in the literal history of God's people there is an indication of how the enemy of God's testimony is always trying to work? And is not this the very thing which obtains very largely today? We have seen in our earlier meditation that the weapons of the people of God are primarily prayer and the Word. Bringing that back to this special connection, it at once becomes clear that a master-stroke of the enemy is to forestall us in that twofold direction. It is of no small importance to us to remember that our adversary does not wait until the hour of battle to set his forces in motion, but is always at work well ahead in anticipation of that hour. For him to do otherwise would be fatal to him. The same applies to us. We have found so often that when we have actually come to deal with a situation we are unequipped, for the essential equipment has been taken from us in advance. In that hour of emergency there is no facility for getting equipment, and we learn a bitter lesson by helplessness in a moment of great need or opportunity. The demand is that we should maintain a steady and strong life of prayer and in the Word when there is no particular call or need, and only thus shall we be on the spot and spiritually equipped when special need arises.

This unequipped condition represents spiritual dishonour and loss of position before God. Have you been struck with the change of title given to the Lord's people in these

chapters? Sometimes they are called 'the Hebrews'; sometimes 'Israel.' If you look closely you will find that the Spirit of the Lord calls them 'Hebrews' when they are on the side of the Philistines, and 'Israel' when they are not. They lose the dignity of that name 'Israel' - a prince with God - when they are on the side of the Philistines. When they are not on that side the Lord, in grace, still calls them 'Israel,' even though they may be in a state of weakness, and far short of what He would have them be. But the Philistines always called them 'Hebrews,' and the Lord allows that title to stand when they are in Philistine hands. Their dignity as 'a prince with God' has gone. What is it that makes us princes with God? It is that prayer-life and that life in the Word. We lose our dignity, our position and our ascendancy if the enemy robs us of our prayer-life and our life in the Word. Is that not true to experience? Of course it is! We were probably taught this when we were first saved, but there is a special and particular activity and determination of the enemy that we shall not pray nor get to God's Word in that larger realm of spiritual conflict and warfare where the whole testimony of the Lord is involved, in that 'advance position' of the people of God where they get away from the earthlies as Christians and into the heavenlies as members of Christ's Body. By forestalling, preventing, frustrating and destroying that prayer-life and that life in the Word, he will very soon demoralize the Church and its members spiritually and rob them of their ascendancy.

May the Lord again bring to our hearts the stress and emphasis of the necessity for standing against the wiles of the devil! For they are directed, not only to oppose the prayer-life that we have, but to prevent us from having more of a prayer-life and a life in God's Word. Do suffer this repetition, for I am certain that it is needed. You realize that if the enemy can have his way you will not have a prayer-life. He will put anything and everything conceivable, natural and supernatural, in the way of prayer to prevent it, and in the way of your life in God's Word. These are the two mighty weapons of our warfare. There needs to be that aliveness and awakesness to the enemy's devices which put us also in the place of being able to forestall. The Apostle said: "We are not ignorant of his devices," and to be aware of what the enemy is out to do is half the battle. Oh! things come along so often to hinder prayer and our life in the Word! They come along in such a natural way, in such an unassuming and unpretentious way that they seem to be just the sort of things that would naturally happen and we expect them as the natural and, perhaps, to be expected things of our lives, but when we have gone on a few weeks we have found that our prayer-life has gone. How did it go? The enemy did not make a demonstration, nor come in some obvious way and announce that he was going to destroy our prayer-life with this or that, but it just happened.

Watching unto Prayer

Watch unto prayer! Watching and praying in this sense is watching that you may pray, and watching against things that would stop you praying. And there must be a 'lest' in us: "lest Satan should get an advantage." You see, there is forestalling, prevention on our part, a standing against the wiles of the devil. We must have a fresh question about very ordinary, natural occurrences to see if there is not some weapon in them, some subtle device of the enemy to rob us of prayer. What is it that prevents the necessary, the essential prayer-life? Let us ask whether, after all, this is a thing about which we have to take a stand. Let us interrogate the thing. There has to be a greater watchfulness on our part against the strategic movements of the enemy in this direction

lest we have our weapons stolen, or unsharpened. Well, I am sure that that is a note that needs to be rung out more and more. Do watch against the wiles of the enemy which are directed to take away your weapons of warfare, your prayer-life, and your life in the Word!

The Place of the Word in Prayer

These two things are joined together by the Holy Spirit: "the sword of the Spirit which is the word of God; praying..." The Holy Spirit has linked these two things closely. He might have put the sword in the beginning, or He might have put it somewhere else. You would have thought that the Apostle, taking in the Roman soldier as he stood there, seeing the girdle and the sword attached to the girdle, would have put the sword next to the girdle and said: 'Having on the girdle of truth and the sword of the Spirit.' But no, he has taken the girdle apart from the sword, and he gets on with the other parts of the panoply which are protective and defensive, and then he brings the two offensive things together at the end: the Word and prayer. They are both basic to a life, not only of being able to resist and have the defensive, but of actual victory, of overcoming, a life which is progressively aggressive. That is what comes out in 1 Samuel 14. There was a sword with Jonathan, and there was a going up on his hands and feet. There was the activity of faith with the weapons of warfare on his part, and he overcame. We have said that it is a tremendous thing to be able to come with the Word of God backing up your prayer and to be able to say to the Lord: "...according to Thy Word." It is a great strength to be able to give the Lord His Word.

Let us take Psalm 119 by way of illustration and point out how frequently the Psalmist used that very phrase: "Quicken Thou me according to Thy word" ... "Strengthen Thou me according unto Thy word" (verses 25, 28). Then let us go on to fill in the word that corresponds with the petition: "But if the Spirit of Him That raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, He That raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by His Spirit That dwelleth in you" (Rom. 8:11). That is God's Word. It is a great thing to have the Word of God with you in prayer so that you may take it before the Lord. It gives you a place of strength. And it is also a great thing to be able to meet the enemy with the Word of God. The Lord Himself went into the wilderness and was tempted of the devil forty days. How did He meet the devil? Just with the Word of God! The Word of God was His weapon, and in the end He went through and overcame with that weapon. It is not that we meet the enemy objectively and begin to quote Scripture audibly to him. That may be necessary sometimes, and it may sometimes be good exercise to meet the enemy with an audible declaration of what God said, but, dear friends, it is necessary to have God's Word in our hearts so that we stand on the promises at all times of temptation and pressure and inward spiritual assault. We cannot stand on them if we do not know them. There is a great strengthening of position when you have the Word of God under your feet. A life in the Word is a very necessary thing for effectual prayer, and these two things go together in a positive, aggressive overcoming of the enemy.

Prayer and the Overcomers

Then this further thing comes out in this portion: That it is a small company which is there in that position. Jonathan says: "There is no restraint to the Lord to save by many or by few" (1 Samuel 14:6). It is a comparatively small company, but they represent the key to the whole situation for the Lord. They stand for the others in a relative position, and the Lord knows that the others would be hard put to it were it not for this small company. The Lord must have them for the sake of the rest. In the final issue the others come into the good which this small company has secured for them. It is what we have so often called 'the overcomer company,' a little group - comparatively speaking - who are standing their ground and maintaining their prayer-life and their life in the Word. These are the hope of the Lord's people, and the Lord's people have no hope apart from them. They are the Lord's key to the larger situation, and He must have them there for the sake of the rest. It is Benjamin, the link between the alienated and distant brethren and the one who is by the throne. It is the little one who is the occasion of their being brought into the full blessing. It is a privileged position, although it is difficult, costly and fraught with much travail and suffering. I must say more to myself, and you must say more to yourself, about the privilege of being an overcomer. I am afraid we are very much impressed with the suffering, the cost and the strenuousness of it, but it is the privilege of standing in a position which is going to mean much to the Lord in a great number of others who may not be in that position at present which ought to impress us.

If the Lord is to bring them, He does not do it, nor can He do it, directly. He does it through the ministration of those who are in that close fellowship with Him which represents a mighty victory over the strategy of the devil. It is a position of privilege, and that is why those who are going that way with the Lord become the central object of the devil's hate and malice, and why it is such a battle for them to maintain the position to which the Lord has called them. So much hangs upon them because of the responsibility which is theirs by reason of the link, and the value of that link, between them and - perhaps - multitudes of others. So Jonathan and his armour bearer (and this is the part of the story that I like so much) had a secret understanding. There were those two massive, forbidding crags on either side, and the Philistines were up there in the place of advantage. Their secret understanding was this: 'If they say that they will come down to us, all right, we will wait for them. But if they say: "Come up to us," then we shall know that the Lord has delivered them into our hands.' You would have thought that they would have put it the other way round, for then they would have had all the advantage and it would have been comparatively easy. But to believe that being called upon to scale those difficult, forbidding crags was the Lord's sign of victory, well, that makes the situation a very strong one, does it not? And the Philistines said: 'Come up to us!' So Jonathan said: "The Lord hath delivered them into the hand of Israel," and as they advanced on hands and feet, which was very difficult climbing, they said: "The victory is ours." They were climbing *in* a victory, not *for* one. They had their weapons, they had faith in God, they stood in a victory and went on in that victory. And Jonathan hewed the Philistines down. They fell before him and his armour bearer slew them. Then the Lord sent an earthquake. When faith had gone as far as it could go, He co-operated and sent consternation among the Philistines. Then the poor, weak Hebrews saw their chance and turned on the Philistines. That was not very noble, nor very

honourable, but Jonathan had been the instrument to bring them out of their weakness into strength, out of their indistinctiveness into a clear testimony, and out from the place where the clearness of their testimony was lost into a place where now they could take their stand. And a lot of people just need a Jonathan activity to bring them into a clear place. They will come in if the Lord has an instrument strong enough to meet the enemy on their behalf, but they will not come in until there is something that begins to smite the Philistines for them. Are you going to be one of these?

The Sifted Company

I must close, but I do want to say just a word about the Lord sifting down until He gets something like that, about the necessity for reducing unto effectiveness. Jonathan, his armour bearer and a little company represented a sifted people. They were sifted down on this matter of faith in the Lord, and they were sifted right down to the ground where prayer and the Word were their very life. Gideon's company represented that: a sifted company brought down to a position of absolute faith in God, for that was what God was after - "Lest Israel vaunt themselves against Me saying, 'Mine own hand hath saved me'" (Judges 7:2). They had to be right down to a place where God was their only estate, and faith in Him was the ground upon which they stood. Then every man had to put his sword on his side and stand in his place. You have a very good picture in Gideon's 'three hundred' of a sifted company standing in prayer and the Word of God: "The Sword of the Lord" - the Word of the Lord. The Lord saw to it that all who had heart trouble went home, for a fearful heart is useless. Faith is necessary here. A divided heart is no use and disqualifies its owner. A fearful heart was the first test, and a great host went home because they were fearful-hearted. A divided heart was the next test, and those who went down on their hands and knees to drink the water showed that they were not wholly ready for this business. Those who stood and lapped out of their hands were eager, for they kept on their feet, and this drinking was only done because it was necessary.

Those who lapped were of undivided heart and were wholly in this business. A divided heart disqualifies, and the Lord sees to it that divided hearts are sifted out. At last He gets His company, and they are all with Him in the faith of the Son of God, having a life of deep fellowship with Him in prayer and in the Word. That will always be a sifted company, and we should not be discouraged or think that a strange thing has happened when the Lord begins to sift out and many go home. That is the Lord's way of getting effectiveness. He must sift. He Himself, while here on the earth, gave us very much in His personal teaching in this very connection. He calls, and the reactions to His call are: "Lord suffer me first to go and bury my father." Then there are other interests: "I have bought five yoke of oxen and I go to prove them"; "I have married a wife"; "I have bought a piece of ground, and I must needs go and see it." That is a divided heart! And then we have His own word: "If any man cometh unto Me, and hateth not his own father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple"; "Whosoever doth not bear his own cross, and come after Me, cannot be My disciple." That is no faint heart! The Lord calls for that, and by the three hundred He delivers the Midianites into our hands, and He saves Israel. They are the salvation of the rest.

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