God's Willingness to Bless Saints and Sinners.

BY REV. C. H. SPURGEON.

We have been pleading with God. Prayer after prayer has knocked at heaven's gate, entreating for the conversion of souls, and the upbuilding of the church. I have no doubt that our prayer has been, in itself, acceptable with God, through Jesus Christ. It is in itself a form of worship to which our gracious God hath much respect. The golden vials of the elders before the throne are said to be full of odors, which are the prayers of saints. Prayer is typified by sweet incense, because God delights in it. He loves to see our desires for the accomplishment of his purposes. It is very pleasing to a father, as you who are parents can testify, to see his child in full sympathy with him, and anxious to help him in his work. Though he can do but little, and that little feebly and faultily, yet his eagerness to work with his father, and for his father, gives his father joy. Even thus does our Heavenly Father take pleasure in us, and in our desires for His glory. "Thou didst well in that it was in thine heart," said the Lord to David, even when he did not accept what David proposed to do; and I believe there may be glory brought to God, not only by those prayers which are manifestly answered, but by those which for wise reasons the good Lord is pleased to lay on one side. We are nothing better than children even in prayer, and therefore it is not every request that is wise; but yet we are children, and therefore the cries which come from our hearts touch the heart of our great Father in heaven. Our desires that souls may be saved, and that the church may prosper, are so much in accordance with the mind of God that they must be a sweet savor unto Him. Therefore, brethren, let us pray on as long as breath remains. If prayer pleaseth God, it should always please us.

There are two things, however, which sometimes puzzle us. One is, *to see a child of God anxious to bring others to Christ, and perseveringly using the ordained means, and yet success is not given him,* and men are not brought to Jesus; at least, they are not brought in such numbers as the eager worker desired and expected. Strange sight! Are we really more anxious to save souls than God Himself is? It would be a marvelous spectacle if it were actually the case! It certainly looks so. This is the appearance upon the surface. Our earnest spirits long for the salvation of men. If we could save them, we would save them at once. If it were possible for us, when we speak, to convince and convert every sinner within hearing, it should be done. It looks for the moment as though we were more merciful than the All-merciful, more compassionate than He of whom it is written, "God is love!" Ah; my brethren, it only seems to be so; we humbly ask pardon for yielding to the illusion even for an instant! It is our ignorance of our own hearts which makes us think ourselves so supremely kind and loving. Somewhat of pride mingles with this fond conceit of our own goodness. I fear that, if we were weighed in the scales of the sanctuary, it would be found that we do not possess all that agonizing pity which we suppose ourselves to possess. Too often our compassion shows itself in spasms; and is not a matter of fixed principle. Our zeal comes and goes; but if we felt it as intensely as we think we do, or as intensely always as we do sometimes, then we might have more reason for our complaining and wondering. For the present, we may rather blush for ourselves than complain of our God. We have not yet done all that lies in our power, and therefore we have no ground upon which to complain of our God.

If we are disappointed about our success in Christ's work, what shall we say? Shall we not first look for the cause within ourselves? From observation and experience, I have learned to look very hopefully upon dissatisfaction and anguish when they are seen in Christian workers. It gives me no sorrow to see my brethren unhappy and miserable because others are not saved. It would be a far sadder thing to see them useless and yet contented. If ever I have been satisfied with what I have done for the Lord, I have invariably found my service to prove barren. Pangs go with birth, and anguish precedes success. So far as I am able to judge, it does not seem that the Lord can wisely bless people who are satisfied with themselves, and with their own efforts. It would not be safe to trust the conceited with any large measure of success; they might be injured for life by such honor. Certainly God himself would have small honor, for the individual would steal every bit of it, and wear it himself. When you get to feel, "I am not satisfied, for God is not blessing me as I long to be blessed, and therefore I fear something must be hindering the blessing;" then you are advancing towards a right condition—a condition favorable to success. The Lord is always willing to bless us up to the measure of our fitness to be blessed; and sometimes it is absolutely necessary that we should be distressed, broken-hearted, and brought to an agony of prayer before we can hold the choice gift of the God of grace. I am sure it is so. We are straitened in ourselves. Our own unfitness turns aside the divine benediction. The Lord will have us know the value of the blessing before he gives it to us; and He will also have us know our own inability, apart from His Holy Spirit, to perform any good work, or bring forth any holy fruit. Our God takes care always to have security, that, if He works a great work by us, we shall not appropriate the glory of it to ourselves. He brings us down lower and lower in our esteem, until we feel that we are nothing at all, and then he condescends to use us. Some trumpets are so stuffed with self that God cannot blow through them. Some pitchers are too full of their own muddy water for God to pour the water of life into them. However much we may wish for a blessing, God will not set the seal of His blessing to work which is begun and carried on in the power of self.

Besides this, the Lord wants us to be more thoroughly in sympathy with Himself. He has two designs in making use of us in His service, not only to save souls, but also to bless us as the instruments of such salvation. There are always two edges to God's sword; so that, while He kills sin in the hearer, He strikes a blow at sin in the preacher also. God has a way of killing two birds with one stone; or, if I may use such an expression, of making two birds alive with one quickening word. He has a way of blessing the very channel through which the blessing comes, as well as the people who receive the blessing. It was grace to the Gentiles to be preached to; but Paul called it "grace" to be permitted to preach the unsearchable riches of Christ. The Lord intends to educate us by non-success as well as by success, and therefore He causes us to sigh and cry until His Spirit puts forth His power.

It is a natural law in the spiritual world that joy is not born without sorrow. We must travail in birth before Christ will be formed in men's hearts. There is no reaping in joy without a previous sowing in tears. As Christ Himself suffered to make us blest, so, in our measure, must we endure pain of heart in order to give men peace of mind. We must die that others may live. We must agonize that the tempted may rest. We must mourn that mourners may rejoice. It is a noble thing for a Christian man to act as a priest before the Lord, and, in a certain manner, to take upon Himself the sins of the people, confessing them as though they were His own, and mourning over men's hardness of heart as though it were his own hardness of heart. We do well to take the sinner's place in prayer even as our Lord took that place in sacrifice. It is ours to lay ourselves before God, and cry out of the depths of our souls, as Moses did, "If Thou wilt forgive their sin ——; and if not, blot me, I pray Thee, out of Thy book which Thou hast written." Moses was now in a prepared state to see the nation saved. Some try to make out that Moses did not mean what he said, but he did mean it, and the Lord did not rebuke him for excess of zeal or unguardedness of speech. Remember that for speaking unadvisedly with his lips on another occasion, Moses was shut out of the land of promise, yet for this language he received no check whatever, but prevailed with the Lord to turn away His anger from Israel. He felt in the compassion of his soul much more than could be justified in reasoning in cool blood even as Paul did when he wrote, "For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh." If you ever reach such a state of compassion, you will feel ready, if it were possible, as it were, to put your own soul in pawn for the souls of others; and you will express yourself in words which others may call fanatical. When it comes to pass with you, the Lord will hear you. If you cannot live without a blessing, you shall not live without it. He who weeps for souls shall before long weep for joy. When we live, men will live; when we are quickened to fullness of life the living waters shall flow out of us. Perhaps we have to reach a higher point of grace and love before we shall receive the fullness of the blessing. At any rate, I put the case very strongly, on purpose that you may see the wrongfulness of the supposition that the fault of our non-success lies with the Lord. It cannot be that God is less willing for men to be saved than we are; it cannot be that we have outrun love itself on its own ground. We cry, "Arm of the Lord, awake!" and he replies, "Awake, awake, O Zion." The slumber is with us and not with Him. We must not think that the Lord has set a barrier in the way of our efforts, but we must be encouraged to feel that if we love the souls of men, the Lord must love them more; and that if we would do anything and everything in our power to secure their salvation, we may depend upon it that the Lord is not slack in grace.

A second matter equally causes a difficulty in people's minds, and that is, *to see sinners more willing to be saved than God is to save them.* I have often seen this to be the case *apparently.* Apparently, I say, for it could never be really so. According to the statement of the anxious, it is the case; but their statements are born of confusion, and not of the truth. It cannot be that a sinner should be eager for reconciliation, and the Lord be hard to bring to terms. Did you ever hear of a flock of sheep in the Highlands travelling all over the hills, and roaming down the glens, trying to find their shepherd? Have you seen reports in the newspapers of the efforts made by lost sheep to discover their shepherd, when he has been buried in the snow, and needed to be dug out? You smile, but the parable is to the point. I have observed several singular facts in natural history, but I have never heard of anything so remarkable as sheep seeking out their shepherd, and tracking his wandering footsteps in the cloudy and dark day. Yet that is what we might expect if it be true that sinners seek after the Lord Jesus and cannot find him. They say, "I have sought the Lord, and he has not been found of me: I have cried to him in prayer, and he has not regarded me. Alas, I have hungered and thirsted for Christ, but he is not willing that I should enjoy him!" What singular spectacles! A sheep seeking its straying shepherd! A piece of money searching for its mistress! A prodigal son rejoicing over his lost father! The supposition is altogether too absurd. Is it not? Can it be that, in this race of love, you, a poor, dead sinner, have outstripped the living Saviour? We sometimes sing—

"No sinner can be beforehand with Thee,
Thy grace is most sovereign, most rich and most free;"

and I believe it. If I were to see a needle running across a table all by itself, I should know that under the table a magnet was at work out of sight. When I see a sinner running after Christ, I feel certain that divine love is drawing him; the cords may be invisible, but we are quite sure that they are. If you are seeking Christ, it is because He is seeking you. The desire for grace is caused by the very grace which we desire. You must not dare to charge the Lord Jesus with unwillingness to save, seeing He has laid down His life to prove His eagerness to redeem. No, it is not possible that there can be any backwardness with the Saviour; the backwardness lies with you. Get rid of the unbelieving and dishonoring notion that Jesus is unwilling to forgive, and at once throw yourself into His arms. He thirsts to bless men; it is His meat and His drink in this respect to do the will of Him that sent Him. You are being drawn by His loving hands, those warm desires for salvation are created in you by His Holy Spirit; believe this, and thus recognize the bond which unites you to the Lord; by faith that bond will become consciously stronger from day to day. Trust wholly in Jesus, and the work is done. Trust Him simply; trust Him solely; trust Him without hesitation and you are saved.

It is remarkable that very often the most common-place things that we say in our preaching strike attention and convey blessing. An evangelist, some time ago, while he was explaining faith, took up a book, and handed it to a friend. "Now," said he to his friend, "suppose this to be salvation; I freely present it to you. Have you got it?" "Yes, I have it." "How did you get it? Did you buy it? Did you work for it? Did you make it?" "No, you gave it to me, and I took it." "I gave it to you, and you took it;" and that is how we receive salvation from the Lord. He gives it to us freely, and we take it by faith; that is all. Did the friend wash his hands, or put on kid gloves, before he took the book? No. If he had done so, he would not more surely have received the book; his hand did very well just as it was. It is just so with the gift of God. If a very poor man asks you to help him, and you offer him a shilling, he does not say, "Please, sir, I cannot accept your money, for I am not dressed in good enough clothes." He is not so foolish; he asks no questions, but gladly takes what is freely given. Even so, let us accept Christ as the gift of God. The worse we are, the more we need Jesus; and the more unprepared for Christ we seem, the more prepared we are for Him, in the unquestionable sense that need is the best preparation for receiving charity. When the housewife looks out the linen for the laundry, she does not say, "This garment is too dirty to be washed." No, no. As she looks over the household linen, there may be a piece or two so little soiled that she questions whether she shall send them to be washed; but if one piece is worse than the rest, she is quite sure that it is fit to go, and she puts it without a question into the bag. Oh, my sinful friend, your sinfulness is the reason why you should go to Christ for cleansing! Did you ever know a man stop away from dinner because he was hungry? Did you ever say, "I must not drink because I am thirsty?" Do men say, "When I am not quite so thirsty, then I will drink; when I am not quite so faint, then I will eat?" Does any sick man say, "I am so ill that I shall not send for a doctor till I am better?" We do not talk in this fashion about other matters; then why do we talk so about our souls? Jesus Christ asks nothing of us except that we will receive Him; and He presents Himself to us freely. We say, "There is nothing freer than a gift," so there is nothing freer than the grace of God. "This is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in His Son." "God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

Some of you seem to me like the poor dogs that go about muzzled; if there is a bone you cannot get at it. It seems as if the devil had muzzled some of you, so that you dare not take the good things of the gospel to yourselves. O Lord, be pleased to take the muzzles off those poor dogs! Oh, that they could but get a taste of what the Lord has prepared for them that love Him! You may have any and every gospel blessing if you dare to take it. Make a dash for it. Believe that Jesus Christ is able to save you. Trust Him and He has saved you.

Do you say that you will not now believe, but will wait till your own heart is better, and you will feel more inward encouragement? How foolish? You will wait in vain. Did you ever hear of the deaf man who waited to hear the ticking of a sun-dial? He was as wise a man as you are. Cease to look within, and begin to look up. Jesus saves all those who trust Him to save them. End all questions and delays, and *be saved at once.*

— An eccentric clergyman in Cornwall had been much annoyed by a way the members of his congregation had got into of looking around to take stock of late comers. After enduring the annoyance for some time he said on entering the reading-desk, one day: "Brethren, I regret to see that your attention is called away from your religious duties by your very natural desire to see who comes in behind you. I propose, henceforth, to save you the trouble by naming each person who may enter, and I hope that the service will then be allowed to proceed without interruption." He then began: "Dearly beloved," but paused half way to interpolate: "Farmer Stubbins, with his wife and daughter." Farmer Stubbins looked rather surprised, but the minister with perfect gravity, resumed his exhortation. Presently he again paused: "Sam Gurtis and William Diggle." The abashed congregation kept their eyes studiously bent on their books. The services proceeded in the most orderly manner, the parson interrupting himself every now and then to name some new comer. At last he said, still with the same perfect gravity: "Mrs. Symons, of the Red Lion, in a new bonnet." In a moment he felt his mistake, but it was too late. Every feminine head in the congregation had turned around.

— Miss Marietta Holley, who has interested and amused so many readers by the sayings and doings of "Samanthy Allen," is thus described in the *Epoch:* "Miss Holly is a trifle above the average height, and has a fine, well proportioned form. She has a queenly but gracious bearing; still her manners are charmingly natural and artless. She has a rare creamy paleness of complexion, relieved by the carmine of a pleasant mouth. Her hair, which is wavy and light brown, sprinkled with gray, is worn in a becoming style; but while her profile, which is decidedly Grecian, is a most proper exponent of the high bred soul within, it is her brown eyes, soft, bright, far-seeing and magnetic, and her natural, sympathetic, sunny manners, that most attract and impress you. She has just the slightest possible hint of a cute little lisp in her speech. She is very engaging in conversation, and her peculiar gift of humor and repartee is by no means hidden when chatting with her friends."

Something to Happen.

BY SYDNEY DAYRE.

"O dear, I do wish something would happen."

Hester laid aside her book with a yawn, and leaned back in her chair with a woe begone face.

"Don't say that, my dear, don't," said Aunt Maria.

"Why, Aunt Maria, what is the matter?"

Aunt Maria had raised her hand in a half-dismayed, half warning manner as the words came in a very grave tone.

"I haven't said anything so very dreadful, have I?" said Hester with a smile.

"No, dear, but I used to say very much the same thing when I was about your age. Why do you want something to happen?"

"O, because I am tired of the same old ways, the same humdrum things every day. It's getting up in the morning at the same time and sitting down to the same table with pretty much the same things on it—"

"Are not the things always nice and the table always orderly?"

"Of course they are. Mother wouldn't have them any other way. And then it's a little peep at the lessons we learned the night before, and perhaps a little change of a run into the garden. And then it is school—the same lessons and the same teacher and the same girls—nothing ever new unless it's a lecture with an electrical machine, or one of the girls doing something dreadfully bad and being sent up to Mr. Lewis. Then it's dinner. Then it's a walk somewhere or an errand. Then it's study and practicing, study and practicing, and go to bed again."

"And do you find your life such a dreary, unhappy one, Hester?"

"No, indeed, Aunt Maria. I like my studies,—all but algebra—and I like most of the girls at school and we have a good deal of fun there. It's just that I feel as though I'd like a change. For instance, Eleanor Marue's brother, a good many years older than herself, who has been away from home for years, and they hadn't heard from him for a long time, came back quite unexpectedly the other day."

"A very pleasant surprise, I suppose."

"Yes indeed. They were all in the greatest flurry over it. Eleanor told me she had never been so happy in her life. And Jane King's father had an old uncle die—"

"That was delightful, of course."

"A very old man, Auntie, perfectly helpless and childless, a mercy for him to be taken away—and left them a great deal of property. Now, of course, I don't want any one to die, but if somebody had to die, you know I've always thought it would be so splendid to have money left you."

"I dare say. Is there anything else you would like to have happen?"

"Why, yes, plenty of things, if I should stop to think."

"I wouldn't stop to think. You can spend your time more profitably."

"Tell me about some of your wishings, Auntie. Did you get tired of school and practicing?"

"Not exactly. Girls in my time did not go to school all the time as they do now, and I never learned to play the piano, and as for singing all we did of that was to go to singing-school once a week and then sing just as we pleased at home between times. I used to knit and sew. I never saw a sewing-machine till I was grown up. But for all my life was so different from yours, I think I must have been something like you,"—Aunt Maria pinched the cheek of the pretty school girl who sat beside her,—"for I used to get into the same way of thinking the days were monotonous and wishing for some kind of a change. We had plenty of fun in our way, but I used to wonder if there would ever be anything to think of but helping about the housework in the morning, sewing or reading in the afternoon with an occasional visit to or from our country neighbors, and knitting in the evening while some one read aloud."

"And how did your change come, Aunt Maria? Of course it did come sooner or later, for your life is very different from what it was then."

"Ah, yes, dear, it came. Not the happy joyous kind of a change you speak of, for I don't believe from what I have seen of life that such a changes come often to any except the people in novels. It came to me in a way which showed me how sweet and blessed had been the peace and quiet of the life I had thought so dull. Somebody came home and somebody died. My oldest sister, who lived a few miles from us, was coming for a little visit, when she was thrown from her wagon and injured so badly that she lived in great suffering only a few weeks. Her two little children came to us to be cared for, and I don't know whether it was the sorrow or the extra care, or both, but mother was taken with typhoid fever, and one of my brothers and both the children caught it of her. Most of the neighbors were afraid of it and we couldn't get any regular help. Hester, I hope you'll never have to realize as I did then, what a blessing it is to have things go on in the same old way. It takes such times to teach us to be thankful to be able to go to bed with the prospect of an undisturbed night of rest, to get up in the morning to a neat, comfortable breakfast, with no heavy sorrow pressing and grinding you to the very earth.

"Well, my brother and one of the little ones were taken, the rest of us lived through that dreadful time, people do, you know,—and we settled down to a quiet life again. But it was not the old life. The first break among us had come and things never could be the same again, although years and years passed before the changes came which made the old home no longer a home for me."

Hester caressingly patted the dear old face as Aunt Hester wiped a tear from her eye and said:

"You see, dear, it is natural that I should feel almost frightened when I hear people wishing for change when nothing about them could be much better and might be far worse. Be thankful to the dear Lord for every peaceful day and quiet night you spend, believing that most of the great changes which come to us as we go on in this changeful world must, in the very course of human events, be sad ones."

"Aunt Maria," said Hester, coming to her aunt a few months later; "you remember our talk about my wanting something to happen?"

"Yes, dear."

"When I told you about Eleanor Marue's brother coming home and Jane King's father's uncle leaving them some money?"

"Yes."

"Well, it hasn't been so nice, after all. I've heard that Eleanor's brother got into bad ways while he was away from home so long, and is giving his father trouble, And Jane told me there has been a great deal of fuss about the property that was left them, and there was a law-suit and her father has had to be away from home for weeks and weeks to see about it, and it's more trouble than it's worth. I think you are right about things happening, Auntie. I'm going to be glad and thankful for the every-day things."—*Standard.*

Professor Drummond on "What is a Christian?"

Professor Drummond, in an address at the opening last week of the new institute for the Stirling Young Men's Christian Association, said:—Young men were learning to respect more perhaps than ever young men did the word "Christian." Time was when it was synonymous with cant and unreality, and strained feeling, and sanctimoniousness. That day was not quite past yet, but it was passing. He heard this definition the other day of a Christian man by a cynic: "A Christian man is a man whose great aim in life is a selfish desire to save his own soul, who, in order to do that, goes regularly to church, and whose supreme hope is to get to heaven when he dies." That reminded one of Huxley's examination paper in which the question was put—"What is a lobster?" One student replied that a lobster was a red fish, which moved backwards. The examiner noted that this was a very good answer, but for three things. In the first place a lobster was not a fish; second, it was not red; and third, it did not move backwards. If there was anything that a Christian was not, it was one who had a selfish desire to save his own soul. Christianity, as we understood it from Christ, appealed to the generous side of a young man's nature, and not to the selfish side. In the new version of the New Testament the word "soul" was always translated in this connection by the word "life." That was a revolution in popular theology, and it would make a revolution in every Young Men's Christian Association in the country when it came to be seen that a man's Christianity did not consist in merely saving his own soul, but in sanctifying and purifying the lives of his fellow-men. They were told in the New Testament that Christianity was leaven, and "leaven" came from the same root word as lever, meaning that which raised up, which elevated; and a Christian young man was a man who raised up or elevated the life of those round about him. They were also told it was salt, and salt was that which saved from corruption. What was it that saved the life of a place like Stirling from being utterly rotten, but the Christian elements which were in it? Matthew Arnold had said, "Show me ten square miles in any part of the world outside Christianity where the life of man and the purity of women are safe, and I will give Christianity up." In no part of the world was there any such ten square miles outside Christianity. Christian men were the salt of the earth in the most literal sense. They, and they alone, kept a community like this from corruption.—*British Weekly.*

Catechism on the World.

What is the population of the world? Some persons estimate it at 1,500,000,000, and others at 1,434,000,000.

How are these to be divided religiously? Into Christians, Jews, Mohammedans, and heathen.

How many are called Christians? About 390,000,000.

How are those called Christians divided? Into Protestant, Greek, and Oriental Churches and Roman Catholics.

How many are Protestants? About 116,000,000. These are inhabitants of nominally Protestant countries, but there are only about 30,000,000 who are members of Protestant churches.

How many Jews are there? About 8,000,000.

How many Mohammedans? About 170,000,000.

How many heathen are there? About 856,000,000. Under this head are included Shintos, Buddhists, Confucianists, Brahmanists, Fetish, etc.

What is the population of America? About 100,000,000, there being 69,000,000 in North America and 34,000,000 in South America. About one-fourth of the people of North America and nearly all the people of South America are Roman Catholics.

What is the population of Europe? About 332,000,000, of whom one-third are members of the Greek church, one-third Protestants, and one-third Roman Catholics.

What is the population of Asia? About 800,000,000, of whom about one-fifth are Mohammedans, and nearly all the others are heathen.

What is the population of Africa? About 200,000,000, of whom one-tenth are Mohammedans and three-fourths are heathen.

In heathen and Mohammedan lands how many Protestant missionaries are there? About 6,700, of whom 2,700 are women.

How many native laborers? About 33,000.

How many adherents? About 2,250,000.

How many members? About 750,000.

How many organized churches? About 5,000.

How much money is expended each year by Protestants to give the gospel to heathen? About $10,000,000. Of this about $4,000,000 is raised in America and $6,000,000 in Great Britain.

How many ministers are there in the United States to every 800 persons? One.

How many missionaries are there to every 400,000 souls in foreign lands? One.

What is expected of us? To send the gospel to every creature.—*Gospel in All Lands.*

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