

## WHAT DO WE MEAN WHEN WE PRAY?

By Rev. J. N. Short.

When blind Bartimæus sat by the wayside begging, he heard that Jesus of Nazareth was coming, and he began to cry out, "Jesus, thou Son of David, have mercy on me." The more they tried to make him hold his peace, "he cried the more a great deal, Thou Son of David, have mercy on me!"

No doubt he was a good Jew. He believed the Law and the Prophets. As such, he believed in the coming of the Messiah. He had not seen Jesus of Nazareth with his eyes. But he did some deep thinking. This would come under the head of "new business" with some people.

He had heard what some said of Jesus. To thinking people "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." He believed Jesus could help him. In the language of his prayer, he reveals that he believes Jesus is the Messiah. If he had been a Unitarian he would not have prayed at all. He could only have said in that case, like all Liberalists today, "He is only the son of Joseph." As a teacher and an example he would have been no help now.

But as a good Jew he was conversant with the Law and the Prophets. And though blind, he was deeply thoughtful. So when he heard of the coming of Jesus his way he cried, "Jesus, thou Son of David, have mercy on me." His need was so great that it overshadowed every other consideration; he had but one thought when he prayed.

Jesus recognized his earnest, intense spirit, born of great need, and of a great faith, which the rebuke of the cold-blooded about him could not quench. Jesus admired his faith, based upon all he knew and had heard.

Such a spirit and cry always attracts the attention of Jesus. And he commanded him to be called. When told that Jesus called him he rose up, throwing away his garment that would impede him, and came to Jesus.

Then Jesus asked him, "What wilt thou that I shall do unto thee?" As a good Jew, believing in God, he knew of but one need, and he said, "Lord, that I might receive my sight."

The response of Jesus implied the right spirit in the man. Jesus said unto him, "Go thy way; thy faith hath made thee whole." But it is worth while to notice, "Immediately he received his sight," and did not go *his* way, but "Followed Jesus in the way."

As sure as Jesus is the Christ, by the Holy Spirit and the Word of God in its commands and promises, He says to every man who prays for help, "What wilt thou that I shall do unto thee?" In the spirit of the answer to this question we may discover the secret of the many dead forms and meaningless prayers.

Not discovering that prayer is the most serious and definite business of our lives, we have not yet prayed to any good purpose. We can make no conditions with God when we pray. If we talk with God, remember God talks with us. Then true prayer drives us into a corner, where we will have to say what we mean, and mean what we say.

When we pray we come face to face with God in Jesus Christ as surely as Bartimæus did. And no more certain did Jesus say to him, "What wilt thou that I should do unto thee?" than He says the same to all. As moral beings, the truth of God in Jesus Christ and the agency of the Holy Spirit press this inquiry upon sincere souls.

Now is it true that so-called believers can continually pray, and be indifferent to the one great need and purpose of God in Jesus Christ concerning them? He asks, "What wilt thou that I shall do unto thee?"

God Almighty has provided the best, the one supreme thing for you and me. It is written, "My God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus." God "is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us." Then as you pray, He inquires, "What do you mean? 'What wilt thou that I shall do unto thee?'"

Now when God presses this inquiry upon us, is it possible that we can continue to pray, and not face this question, and thus dodge the issue and purpose of God in our creation and redemption, "that we should be holy, and without blame before him in love?"

I confess this supreme thought and purpose of God in Christ faced me, after I began the divine life, and I could not get rid of it, I could not close my eyes to the truth, and dodge this question and conviction and continue to pray. I could not do it without regarding iniquity in my heart. But the psalmist says, "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me."

I read, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ; according as he hath chosen us before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love."

In my early life this was the issue and purpose He pressed upon me. The truth of God and the Holy Spirit drove me into a corner. I could not say, "I can not," because He pressed the question, "What wilt thou that I shall do unto thee?" It was not, What would I do? but, What would I have Him do to me?

As earnestly as I prayed for help, His persistent inquiry was, "What wilt thou that I shall do unto thee?" Plainly, in the language of today, I was up against it. To draw back was to prove that I was insincere, that I did not want God's eternal purpose realized in me; that I did not want to be the man God created me to be. That was then to go on saying prayers, and never get anywhere, and thus breaking with God.

It is written, "He that cometh to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him." I could not then continue to pray, and not pray up against God's great purpose in me, that I "should be holy and without blame before Him in love."

In my earnestness He inquired, "What wilt thou that I shall do unto thee?" To close my eyes to the truth, dodge the issue, seek to compromise, would be spiritual death. To not honestly face this purpose explains the dead prayers and the lifeless ritualism resorted to before a mocking world by professed believers and a worldly church.

Jesus says, "Whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple." Then, according to His word, and according to his dealings with me, He plainly implies, "Since you do not desire and seek that for which I came into the world, and for which I gave my life; since you evade the great issue upon which eternal life depends; since you make many prayers, and close your eyes to the truth, and when in reply to your prayers, I inquire, 'What wilt thou that I shall do unto thee?' you do not face the question, but ignore the one divine requirement, and seek to compromise and seek in your prayers to get God to compromise the truth as it is in His eternal Son, your prayers are vain and to no good purpose."

Jesus says, "Howbeit when he the Spirit of Truth is come, He will guide you into all truth." Has He done this in your case? Is He doing it? Can He do it in answer to your prayer?

In the light of His commandment, which "is exceeding broad," and His "exceeding great and

precious promises," when you pray He inquires, "What wilt thou that I shall do unto thee?" Do you refuse in your prayer and faith to identify yourself with Him, to stand "perfect and complete in all the will of God?" Can you do this, and go on through the mockery of prayer and worship? Are you defeating God's eternal purpose in you?

True prayer means obedience, and obedience means holiness unto the Lord.

## UNITED AND PERSISTENT PRAYER.

At a missionary meeting in London some years ago the Rev. C. H. Spurgeon illustrated the importance of united, earnest and persevering prayer in this way.

"I had an odd illustration of its power the other day in Italy. In the hotel there there are little ivory buttons in the wall, upon which you put your finger. They communicate with electric wires, which ring the bells downstairs. A friend came in to take tea with us, and I put my finger on the button, but nobody came. I did it again; still nobody came. 'Now,' said my friend, I will put you up to a wrinkle—keep your finger on the button. If you only just put it on, it rings the bell; but if you keep your finger on, the bell will keep on ringing, ringing downstairs.' Well, I did so; but even then the waiter did not come. At length, my friend said, 'We have a couple of bedrooms here; I will go into one, and your friend can go into the other; let us ring all three bells, and then we shall fetch up all the waiters in the hotel.' So we put our fingers on these three buttons, and kept them there, and I warrant you, the passage was soon full of waiters, tumbling over one another. They thought the whole house must be on fire. We simply explained that, as the ringing of one bell did not do, we thought it was a capital plan, but if they would only come more quickly another time we would do it no more.

"Every time a man prays he rings the great bell in heaven. If two of you agree as touching anything concerning the kingdom, it shall be done unto you." There is no resisting it. If every man and woman here would begin to put their fingers upon the bell, the electric communication between earth and heaven, it would awake the very angels, and bring them down with untold blessings upon the church and upon the world. We must pray. Call back your missionaries if you do not mean to pray. You may refuse your contribution if you like, or give them to some common educational purpose. They are altogether as much wasted as if they were flung into the sea. Unless the church will pray it will be in vain for it to give. But upon the condition of our churches at home will depend even the contributions that come into the missions; for I believe that those churches will give most, other things being equal, in which the religious life is most active.—Selected.

Rev. C. H. Spurgeon, when asked if he would defend the Bible, gave the answer: "Defend it! I would as soon defend a lion. Let it out—it can defend itself."

A pastor who refuses to get under the burden and lift, is of no practical use to the church—he adds to the burden.