

### EFFECTIVE PRAYER, OR DOES PRAYER CHANGE THINGS? (EXTRACTS)

"The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much."—James 5:16.

The revised version of the Chinese New Testament, which is an exceedingly accurate and helpful translation of the original, turned into English, would read something like this: "The energy put forth by the prayer of a righteous man issues in mighty results."

There is a condition expressed in our text which we must not overlook. We are not told that the energy put forth by the prayer of any man accomplishes mighty things; it is the prayer of a righteous man which has this effect. Now, we know what is meant by a righteous man, namely, one who has renounced his own goodness, which is as filthy rags, has accepted Christ's salvation, and stands justified by faith in Him.

We must keep in mind, however, that righteousness has also a practical as well as a theological aspect, and that the justified man must through the grace of God operating within him, become a right man in his character and conduct. Only thus can he be an effectual intercessor. Some one, moreover, has reminded us that righteousness has two dimensions. There is perpendicular rightness—our relation with God; and there is horizontal rightness—our relation with our fellow men. "Beloved," writes the Apostle John, "if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God; and whatsoever we ask we receive of Him, because we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasant in His sight." Have you noticed, in that great fifteenth chapter of John, the two "whatsoevers?" First, ye are my friends if ye do whatsoever I command you." And then, "that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, He may give it you." We can have that "whatsoever" of answered prayer fulfilled only as we fulfill that other "whatsoever" of obedience to Christ. Accordingly the Apostle Paul tells how he exercised himself to have constantly "a conscience void of offence toward God and toward men."

As prayer is the highest of all ministries, so its conditions are the most exacting. I venture to think that effective praying has even more severe conditions than effective preaching. I realize that both of these great ministries properly demand rightness of heart and life, and yet there is a sense in which a man can be effective, in a measure, as a preacher when he cannot as an intercessor. In the pulpit he may substitute for spiritual power a strong personality, eloquence of speech, keenness of intellect, and the like, and thus profoundly impress his hearers, but in prayer he stands alone before God, who seeth in secret and looketh upon the heart, and nothing passes there save reality.

Let us remember, then, that prayer is not some detached and separate function of the soul, not some special gift imparted to one Christian and denied to others. No, prayer is just a part of our spiritual life as a whole, and our power in prayer depends upon our Christian character and conduct, upon our right relations with God and men.

Thank God, prevailing prayer is not a thing entirely confined to the past. Let me give you one illustration from our own day, with the facts of which I am intimately acquainted.

It was in a village in Ohio that a blacksmith came home from the forge one Saturday evening and sat down to his humble supper.

He was a godly man, who with his wife, was supporting a girl in a mission school in India. On his plate had been placed a letter just received from India. He broke the seal and began to read. A serious look soon crossed his face, and pushing himself back from the table he said, "Wife, I cannot eat my supper. I must pray." Entering at once into his closet, he betook himself to prayer and, like Elijah, "he prayed in his prayer."

The letter in question had brought sad news. The missionary, whom I knew personally, told about this girl, how she had resisted all efforts for her spiritual help. She had become hard and incorrigible, and was not only resisting Christ for herself, but was standing seriously in the way of others accepting Him. Unless a change should come very shortly in this girl, the missionary wrote, they would be obliged, for the sake of the other girls, to send her from the school altogether.

The blacksmith entered into his closet and prayed. Now Saturday night in Ohio, as you all know, is Sunday morning in India, allowing for the difference in time. As was afterwards learned, on that Sunday morning the mission lady gathered with her class of girls in Sunday school as usual. The lesson, however, had not proceeded far until, without apparent reason, this incorrigible girl leaped from her seat on the floor, flung herself in tears at the feet of the missionary, and wept her way to the Saviour. The other girls were deeply moved, one by one they followed her example, and salvation came to the whole class that morning. Vital energy had been put forth by prayer in Ohio and, as a result, great things came to pass in India.

Just as the sun shines in its strength upon the water and draws the water skyward from its bosom until it forms into clouds, and then rising wind wafts those clouds to some other locality, and by and by they break in refreshing showers upon some parched area, so God in heaven draws from the heart of a responsive child of His on earth prayers which ascend to heaven and are stored up as incense in golden censers (according to the imagery of the light of Revelation) and then the Spirit of the Lord takes and wafts those prayers until they hover, like a cloud, over some dark land like India or China, and in the fulness of time burst in showers of saving grace and power upon parched and needy hearts out yonder.

Does prayer change things? Yes, indeed it does!

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### GREAT HINDRANCES TO PRAYER

Satan sentinels the gateway of prayer. Andrew Bonar has left it on record that he never entered into a season of pure prayer without a fierce battle at the threshold. Satan dreads nothing like prayer. He knows he cannot frighten saints with hideous features or overcome them by coarse enticement. He stands at the portals of the Holy of Holies as an "angel of light." He does not openly attack; he diverts. The Church that lost its "first love" was full of good works (Rev. 2:4). Activities are multiplied that meditation may be ousted, and organizations are increased that prayer may have no chance. Souls may be lost in good works as surely as in evil ways. The one concern of Satan is to keep the saints from prayer. He fears nothing from prayerless studies, pray-

erless work, prayerless religion. He laughs at our toil, mocks at our wisdom, but trembles when we pray.—Sel.

Prayer is not overcoming God's reluctance; it is taking hold of God's willingness. Prayer is not teasing God for something, or coaxing to do. Oh, no! As a matter of fact, God is far Him to do something which He is reluctant more willing to give and to do than we are to ask Him; and the desire which we find in our own hearts is but the feeble reflection of His great desire. Prayer is rather the laying hold upon God's willingness and thus bringing into play His almighty power.—Sel.

The late Dr. A. C. Dixon, of Spurgeon's Tabernacle, when speaking on the theme of prayer, said: "When we rely upon organization, we get what organization can do; when we rely upon education, we get what education can do; when we rely upon eloquence, we get what eloquence can do. And so on. Nor am I disposed to undervalue any of these things in their proper place. But," he added impressively, "when we rely upon prayer, we get what God can do."—Sel.

### DO IT YOURSELF

Dr. John R. Mott, while on an evangelistic and teaching tour in India, heard of a centre in which a great work of salvation and blessing was going on. He said he had always found, in such case, that the work began with and centred around one praying person. So he was not surprised to learn that this work was known to have started from the prayers of one missionary, who was spending five hours a day in intercession. Dr. Mott says that he took great pains to visit this man, and asked him for suggestions as to how to increase the number of intercessors in the world. The man, himself a Bible teacher also, simply smiled and said, "For years I laboured to instruct and inspire people to the ministry of intercession, but to very little purpose, so I have decided that the only way to get other people to pray is to do it myself!"—From *Living Waters*....

"The Lord taketh pleasure in His people: He will beautify the meek with salvation." Ps. 149:4.

The more men pray, the more they will love prayer, and the more they will enjoy God. On the other hand, the more we pray, the more will God delight in us. This is not merely the love of benevolence, for God is benevolent to all; but He delights in His praying children in the sense of having complacency in their character.

The Bible often speaks of the great interest which God takes in those who live near Him in much prayer. The more we pray, the more God loves to manifest to others that He delights in us, and hears our prayers, as an encouragement to others to pray.—Charles G. Finney.

Learn, like Jesus, only to seek God's glory in prayer and thou shalt become a true intercessor, who can not only approach the throne of grace with his own needs, but can also pray for others the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man that availeth much.—Rev. Andrew Murray.

Beware of everything new in religion for what is essentially new is essentially false. If anybody has an addition to offer it is a perversion. If anybody has a subtraction to offer it is a sacrilege.