HE LEADS US ON.

He leads us on
By paths we did not know,
Upward he leads us, though our steps be slow,
Though oft we faint and falter on the way,
Though storms and darkness oft obscure the day,
Yet when the clouds are gone
We know he leads us on.

He leads us on
Through all the unquiet years;
Past all our dreamland hopes, and doubts and fears
He guides our steps. Through all the the tangled maze
Of sin, of sorrow, and o'erclouded days
We know his will is done;
And still he leads us on.

And he, at last,
After the weary strife,
After the restless fever we call life,
After the dreariness, the aching pain,
The wayward struggles which have proved in vain,
After our toils are past,
Will give us rest at last.

—*Golden Hours.*

Visitor Pulpit.

THOUGHT READING EXTRAORDINARY.

By Rev. C. H. Spurgeon.

"Lord, Thou hast heard the desire of the humble; Thou wilt prepare their heart; Thou wilt cause Thine ear to hear."—Psalm 10 : 17.

1. Our first observation is written upon the surface of the Scripture before us—the lowliest form of prayer may be most true and acceptable. And what is that lowliest form of prayer? Is it not described in the text? "The desire of the humble." It is not the prayer of the serene faith of Abraham, nor the wrestling of energetic Jacob, nor the intercession of prevailing Moses, nor the pleading of holy Samuel, nor the commanding cry of Elias shutting and opening heaven; it is only a desire—a motion of the heart toward good things; and yet the Lord hears it. Indeed, the lowliest form of prayer may be the truest; for the essence of all real prayer is desire. Words are but the habitation of prayer, the living tenant is desire. We see from our text that desires are prevailing prayers; for the Lord has made a point of hearing them: "Thou hast heard the desire of the humble." Other forms of prayer may be attractive to man, and yet they may have no influence whatever with the living God; but this manner of supplication has been successful from of old, even as it is written, "He will fulfil the desire of them that fear him," and again, "The desire of the righteous shall be granted." In fact, prayer is desire, as our poet puts it:

"Prayer is the soul's sincere desire,
Utter'd or unexpress'd;
The motion of a hidden fire,
That trembles in the breast."

The lowest form of true prayer secures the ear of the Highest, and what more is needed?

Observe, it is only a desire; "the desire of the humble." A desire may be altogether unattended by speech. The suppliant may not be able to put his desire into words at all; he may be too sorrowful, his emotion may choke his utterance; he may be too quiet, and so may be quite unversed in the use of speech. He may be only able to pour forth groanings that cannot be uttered, and tears whose eloquence is silent; yet God is pleased to hear the desire which lacks expression. Many prayers are very prettily expressed; in fact, they are expressed so grandly that their tawdry fineries will not be tolerated in heaven. Those prayers will never enter heaven's gate which are meant to catch the applause of man. God will say, "They were meant for men, and let men have them." He does not stoop to accept man's leavings, and if a prayer is meant to be a feast for man, God will not be a second-rate guest at its table.

On the other hand, many sincere persons condemn themselves because they cannot offer public prayer as their brethren do; they even tremble perhaps, to pray before their families, and this is a grief to them. I think, if they are men, they should prove their manhood by overcoming such diffidence. I would urge them to make the attempt with much resolution and perseverance; but should they fail in it through positive inability, there will be cause for regret, but no reason for self-condemnation. There may be more prayer in the silent than in the fluent. God has heard prayers which nobody else could possibly have heard, because there was no vocal sound about them. So quick is the ear of God that He heareth that which is not properly the subject of hearing; the true prayer which abides in silence shall not meet with a silent God. * * *

"The desire of the humble" is saturated with a Gospel spirit, and therefore is acceptable with the God of all grace. Pride seems born of the law, though I scarce know why it should be; for the law censures and condemns. Humility is the child of the Gospel, and is brought up upon the knees of grace. If thou wouldst be a child of God thou must be lowly in thine own esteem. If thou wouldst be heard in prayer thou must come to God as needy and empty. Let us have done with merits and deserts, and let this be our cry, "For thy mercy and for thy truth's sake, and for thy Son's sake, hear thou the voice of my prayer." This is the proper Gospel spirit; but if we plead in any other fashion, we shall be sent empty away.

Still, this "desire of the humble" is apt to be somewhat restricted and straitened. If we contract our desires to the measure of our deserts, they will shrivel into nothing; for our deserts are less than nothing. It is ill to pray according to your sense of what you have a right to ask. You have a legal right to ask for nothing but justice, and who among us can abide its action apart from Jesus? "If thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?" You had better pray according to God's command, and that runs thus: "Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it." Forget not this first truth—that what seems to be the lowest form of prayer is, nevertheless, true prayer.

II. Our second point is full of comfort to those who have begun to pray. God is quick to hear the lowliest prayer: "Thou hast heard the desire of the humble." This must be a divine science—this art of hearing desires. We have heard a good deal lately about thought-reading. I give no opinion of that matter among men; but here is a wonderful instance of it with the Lord. "Thou hast heard the desire of the humble." This kind of desire-reading is the prerogative of God alone. He knows our desires even when we do not know them ourselves. Sitting in this Tabernacle you are desiring, but it is quite impossible for the person sitting next to you to know your wishes, and it is quite as well, perhaps, that it is so. You would not like to tell your inward feelings: perhaps your secret is too painful to be told; never mind, God's ear is so quick that He can hear your desires. Wonderful art! We should be very glad if the Lord had promised to hear us when we speak; but He has gone far beyond that, and He hears the unspeakable and unutterable.

It is an art which has been exercised by God in all ages; He does not merely possess the power, but He exercises it. I like my text for putting it in the past tense: "Thou hast heard the desire of the humble." It is a matter of frequent fact, and not merely a possible event. It is not the bare assertion of a power, but the record of a deed. All along through history, wherever gracious men have lived, their hearts have talked with God as well without words as with them. To-day let this be told: it ought not to be buried in ungrateful silence; it is mentioned in the text, let it be mentioned in your conversation.

If some here present had the opportunity, we could tell you how God has heard our desires, and how at times before the desire has actually been formed in the soul the answer has come, according to that word, "Before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear." We had a desire laid upon our heart which we never communicated to any living person except the living God, and we carried that desire in our heart for weeks and months, constantly allowing it to burn in our bosom, and frequently letting it break out in groans and broken cries; and in due time our sighing reached the heart of God. As surely as we have sown in prayer we have in due season reaped a harvest of blessing. Our Lord even in Gethsemane was heard in that he feared—sure pledge to all His redeemed that they shall be heard in their hour of darkness. Happy are they who dwell in God, for they may have what they please at the mercy-seat. * * *

III. Thirdly, we will remark that the heart is the main centre in prayer. That is clearly shown in the text: "Lord, thou hast heard the desire of the humble." Desires are the fruit of the heart. "Thou wilt prepare their heart." When God comes to deal with men in a way of grace, His first business is to prepare their heart; so that most assuredly the state of the heart is of prime importance. The heart is the source, the seat, and the essence of supplication. Prayer with the heart is the heart of prayer; the cry of our soul is the soul of our cry.

Without the heart prayer is a wretched mockery. Do not say, "I read my collect this morning;" you may read fifty collects, and be none the better; do not say, "I went through the prayer which I learned from a godly mother;" you may go throught it twenty thousand times, and yet never pray once. Unless the heart speaks with God, thou hast done nothing for thine own good with all thy paternosters or other goodly words; nay, thou mayest have done something to thine own hurt in all this pretence of praying. I feel that much so-called public prayer is nothing better than presumptuous sin.

If your child should come to you and ask a favor in an affected voice, would you notice him? If, instead of saying, "Dear father, I want so and so," he should take up a book and intone such words as these, "Dearly beloved father, I have to request of thee that thou in thy great affection wilt give unto me such and such things," you would not regard his nonsence. You would say, "Come, boy, what do you want? Tell me plainly; "and if he continued to intone, you would drive him out of the room, perhaps with the aid of your foot. I fear that this praying in sing-song is the most fearful mockery God ever hears. Fancy Peter, when he was beginning to sink, intoning, "Lord, save me." When the heart really gets to speak with God, it cannot talk in affected tones; it throws such rubbish overboard.

But cannot a man pray with his heart and yet use a written prayer? Certainly he can. Many have done so for years. If you cannot walk without your crutches, I would sooner you walked with them than not at all. Still, it is not the best words put together by the most devout men that ever lived, nor the holiest language composed extemporaneously by yourself, that can make up prayer if the heart be gone. Words are seldom more than the baggage of prayer.

Language at best is but the flesh in which prayer is embodied; the desire of the heart is the life of the prayer. See thou to thy heart, for God sees to it: "Thou wilt prepare their heart." Sometimes the Lord puts words into men's mouths; He says, "Take with you words, and come unto me," and thus He prepares words for their use; but in general the main concern with God is that the heart be prepared to plead with Him.

Success comes to the prayer of a glowing heart. When the soul grows warm, and the spirit is fervent, and desires are strong, then, brother, do not spare thy prayers. Set apart a longer season for private devotion when the soul is all alive and active in it. At another time you may have to try very hard and make but small progress, for the chariot wheels may be taken off; let it not at such a time be a source of regret that you wasted a happier season. Cease not to obtain blessings beyond number, both for thyself, for the church, and for a perishing world; but take heed that thy heart be found greatly exercised with longings of soul before God.

IV. Fourthly, God Himself prepares the hearts of His people. "Thou wilt prepare their heart." I am greatly rejoieed by this statement that God will prepare our hearts to pray, because it is a most important business on which so much depends. On the heart the whole machinery of life depends, and it needs preparing, especially for devotion. You cannot spring out of bed and on every occasion pray in a moment without thought or reflection; you cannot say to yourself, "I have just been listening to ungodly talk; and now I am going to pray." It will be poor, pitiful praying which springs up from the barren soul of thoughtlessness. We need preparation in coming into the courts of the Lord's house; the soul had need put her shoes from off her feet because the place is holy.

But this preparation is often as difficult as it is needful; and therefore it is a great mercy that our God undertakes to work it in us. Surely none but the Lord can prepare a heart for prayer. One old writer says it is far harder work to raise the big bell into the steeple than to ring it afterward. This witness is true. When the bell is well hung you can ring it readily enough; but in that uplifting of the heart lies the work and the labor. Before musicians begin to play, they attend to their strings and see that their instruments are in order; you wish that the operation could be dispensed with, but it cannot be, and it is one of the most needful parts of the musician's work. Until he has learned to tune his instrument, what does he know? Until he has tuned it, what can he do? I wish we were all made ready, as a people prepared for the Lord. * * *

V. Lastly, prayer from prepared hearts must be heard. "Thou wilt prepare their heart, thou wilt cause thine ear to hear." I wish you would join those two sentences together in your minds, and carry them home with you. Let the two bells ring in harmony. "Thou wilt prepare their heart; thou wilt cause thine ear to hear." Ring them over and over again; and let their blended music linger in your ear. If God has had love enough to prepare your heart to pray, He has grace enough to give you the blessing. The more difficult thing of the two is not to give the blessing, but to prepare your heart to cry for it; if He has done the one He will certainly do the other. Consider the truthfulness, and the faithfulness, and the goodness of God, and you will see that it is not possible that He should teach a man to pray for a blessing which He will not give. I cannot imagine any one of you tantalizing your child by exciting in him a desire that you do not intend to gratify. It were a very ungenerous thing to offer alms to the poor, and then, when they hold out their hand for it, to mock their poverty with a denial. It were a cruel addition to the miseries of the sick, if they were taken to the hospital and there left to die untended and uncared for. Where God leads you to pray He means you to receive. You find a holy desire in your heart; the Lord put that desire into your heart, and for the honor of His infinite majesty, lest He stain His goodness and dishonor His great name, He must hear you.

With what comfort would I address those here who are beginning to pray. I know I speak to some who are uneasy, unrestful; you tell us you are seeking peace, that day and night a desire for salvation occupies the entire chamber of your soul. Well, this did not come from you own nature; neither the devil nor the old Adam has taught you to pray. Dear hearer, be sure that the great Father who is moving you to cry to Him is hearing you—He is inclining His ear to catch the faintest moan of your spirit. Believe that He is hearing you. Cast yourself at the feet of His dear Son. Behold the wounds of Jesus: let these invite you to draw nigh to God. I know of no such eloquent mouths as the wounds of the dying Lord. Let them persuade you to come to Jesus, to trust, to rest at His dear feet; for since He has inclined your heart to pray He is about to hear you and bless you. The Lord be with you for Jesus' sake. Amen.

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Christ's Resurrection.

The special attention that is now given to the doctrine of the resurrection, centres round the resurrection of Christ. This was the culminating fact of a most wonderful series of events. Paul commences his reasoning with this fact as the crowning miracle of Christ's life. It was in accord with what Christ had promised. He manifested himself to his disciples and overcame their slowness to believe. He walked, and talked, and ate, and drank with them. He manifested himself to five hundred of his disciples at one time. His enemies as well as friends were compelled to own the fact of his resurrection. It was immediately received as an article of faith in all the Christian churches. It is inwrought with the other teachings in the epistles of the New Testament. It was commemorated on the first day of every week by the assembling of Christ's disciples to worship. The most scholarly unbelief concedes the fact.

From all this, it follows that the kingdom of Christ was historically set up in the world. Christ's divine claim is by event established. Christ by this, according to Paul, is declared to be the Son of God with power, the resurrection of all men from the grave is secured, and to all Christians "the resurrection of life." "Because I live," i. e., live in a resurrection life of the body after my death, "ye shall live also."

The consolations and encouragements that legitimately flow from this doctrine so fully established are far too little appreciated by Christians generally.

For, says Dr. Faunce, our dead are alive unto God. They are not "the wandering shades and unsubstantial ghosts" of classical story. They exist still with whatsoever form they now need, and they are looking forward to the time when Christ "shall fashion anew the body of our humiliation that it may be conformed to the body of his glory."

—*Ex.*

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