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# 1

## GOD SHAPES THE WORLD BY PRAYER

THE MORE PRAYING there is in the world, the better the world will be, the mightier the forces against evil everywhere. Prayer, in one phase of its operation, is a disinfectant and a preventive. It purifies the air; it destroys the contagion of evil. Prayer is no fitful, short-lived thing. It is no voice crying unheard and unheeded in the silence. It is a voice which goes into God's ear, and it lives as long as God's ear is open to holy pleas, as long as God's heart is alive to holy things.

God shapes the world by prayer. Prayers are deathless. The lips that uttered them may be closed in death, the heart that felt them may have ceased to beat, but the prayers live before God, and God's heart is set on them and prayers outlive the lives of those who uttered them; they outlive a generation, outlive an age, outlive a world.

That man is the most immortal who has done the most and the best praying. They are God's heroes, God's saints, God's servants, God's vicegerents. A man can pray better because of the prayers of the past; a man can live holier because of the prayers of the past; the man of many and acceptable prayers has done the truest and greatest service to the incoming generation. The prayers of God's saints strengthen the unborn generation against the desolating waves of sin and evil. Woe to the generation of sons who

find their censers empty of the rich incense of prayer, whose fathers have been too busy or too unbelieving to pray, and perils inexpressible and consequences untold are their unhappy heritage. Fortunate are they whose fathers and mothers have left them a wealthy patrimony of prayer.

The prayers of God's saints are the capital stock in heaven by which Christ carries on His great work upon earth. The great throes and mighty convulsions on earth are the results of these prayers. Earth is changed, revolutionized, angels move on more powerful and rapid wing, and God's policy is shaped as the prayers are more numerous, more efficient.

It is true that the mightiest successes that come to God's cause are created and carried on by prayer. God's day of power; the angelic days of activity and power are when God's Church comes into its mightiest inheritance of mightiest faith and mightiest prayer. God's conquering days are when the saints have given themselves to mightiest prayer. When God's house on earth is a house of prayer, then God's house in heaven is busy and all-potent in its plans and movements; then His earthly armies are clothed with the triumphs and spoils of victory and His enemies defeated on every hand.

God conditions the very life and prosperity of His cause on prayer. The condition was put in the very existence of God's cause in this world. *Ask of me* is the one condition God puts in the very advance and triumph of His cause.

Men are to pray—to pray for the advance of God's cause. Prayer puts God in full force in the world. To a prayerful man, God is present in realized force; to a prayerful church, God is present in glorious power, and

Psalm 2 is the divine description of the establishment of God's cause through Jesus Christ. All inferior dispensations have merged in the enthronement of Jesus Christ. God declares the enthronement of His Son. The nations are incensed with bitter hatred against His cause. God is described as laughing at their enfeebled hate. The Lord "will laugh: the Lord will have them in derision"; "Yet I have set my king upon my holy hill of Zion" (Ps 2:4, 6). The decree has passed immutable and eternal:

I will tell of the decree:

Jehovah said unto me, Thou art my son;

This day have I begotten thee.

Ask of me, and I will give thee the nations for thine inheritance,

And the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession.

Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron;

Thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel.

PSALM 2:7-9

*Ask of me* is the condition—a praying people willing and obedient. "And men shall pray for him continually." Under this universal and simple promise men and women of old laid themselves out for God. They prayed and God answered their prayers, and the cause of God was kept alive in the world by the flame of their praying.

Prayer became a settled and only condition to move His Son's Kingdom. "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened" (Lk 11:9). The strongest one in Christ's Kingdom is he who is the best knocker. The secret of success in Christ's Kingdom is the ability to pray. The one who can wield the power of prayer is the strong one, the holy one in Christ's

Kingdom. The most important lesson we can learn is how to pray.

Prayer is the keynote of the most sanctified life, of the holiest ministry. He does the most for God who is the highest skilled in prayer. Jesus Christ exercised His ministry after this order.

*We ought to give ourselves to God with regard to things both temporal and spiritual, and seek our satisfaction only in the fulfilling His will, whether He lead us by suffering, or by consolation, for all would be equal to a soul truly resigned. Prayer is nothing else but a sense of God's presence.*

BROTHER LAWRENCE

*Be sure you look to your secret duty; keep that up whatever you do. The soul cannot prosper in the neglect of it. Apostasy generally begins at the closet door. Be much in secret fellowship with God. It is secret trading that enriches the Christian.*

*Pray alone. Let prayer be the key of the morning and the bolt at night. The best way to fight against sin is to fight it on our knees.*

PHILIP HENRY

*An hour of solitude passed in sincere and earnest prayer, or the conflict with and conquest over a single passion or subtle bosom sin will teach us more of thought, will more effectually awaken the faculty and form the habit of reflection than a year's study in the schools without them.*

COLERIDGE

## 2

### POSSIBILITIES AND NECESSITY OF PRAYER

THE POSSIBILITIES and necessity of prayer, its power and results are manifested in arresting and changing the purposes of God and in relieving the stroke of His power. Abimelech was smitten by God:

And Abraham prayed unto God: and God healed Abimelech, and his wife, and his maid-servants; and they bare *children*.

For Jehovah had fast closed up all the wombs of the house of Abimelech, because of Sarah, Abraham's wife.

GENESIS 20:17-18

Job's miserable, mistaken, comforters had so deported themselves in their controversy with Job that God's wrath was kindled against them. "My servant Job shall pray for you," said God, "for him will I accept" (Job 42:8).

"And Jehovah turned the captivity of Job, when he prayed for his friends" (v. 10).

Jonah was in dire condition when "Jehovah sent out a great wind upon the sea, and there was a mighty tempest" (Jon 1:4). When lots were cast, "the lot fell upon Jonah" (v. 7). He was cast overboard into the sea, but "Jehovah prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah. . . . Then Jonah prayed unto Jehovah his God out of the fish's

belly. . . . And Jehovah spake unto the fish, and it vomited out Jonah upon the dry land" (1:17—2:10).

When the disobedient prophet lifted up his voice in prayer, God heard and sent deliverance.

Pharaoh was a firm believer in the possibilities of prayer and its ability to relieve. When staggering under the woeful curses of God, he pleaded with Moses to intercede for him. "Intreat Jehovah" (Ex 8:8) was his pathetic appeal four times repeated when the plagues were scourging Egypt. Four times were these urgent appeals made to Moses, and four times did prayer lift the dread curse from the hard king and his doomed land.

The blasphemy and idolatry of Israel in making the golden calf and declaring their devotion to it were fearful crimes. The anger of God waxed hot, and He declared that He would destroy the offending people. The Lord was very wroth with Aaron also, and to Moses He said, "Let me alone . . . that I may consume them" (Ex 32:10). But Moses prayed, and kept on praying; day and night he prayed forty days. He makes the record of his prayer struggle. "I fell down," he says, "before Jehovah, as at the first, forty days and forty nights; I did neither eat bread nor drink water; because of all your sin which ye sinned, in doing that which was evil in the sight of Jehovah, to provoke him to anger. For I was afraid of the anger and hot displeasure, wherewith Jehovah was wroth against you to destroy you. But Jehovah hearkened to me that time also. And Jehovah was very angry with Aaron to destroy him: and I prayed for Aaron also at the same time" (Deu 9:18-20).

"Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown" (Jon 1:3). It was the purpose of God to destroy that great and wicked city. But Nineveh prayed, covered with

sackcloth; sitting in ashes, she cried "mightily unto God" (Jon 3:8), and "God repented of the evil which he said he would do unto them; and he did it not" (v. 10).

The message of God to Hezekiah was "Set thine house in order; for thou shalt die, and not live" (Is 38:1). Hezekiah turned his face toward the wall, and prayed unto the Lord, and said: "Remember now, O Jehovah, I beseech thee, how I have walked before thee in truth and with a perfect heart, and have done that which is good in thy sight. And Hezekiah wept sore" (v. 3). God said to Isaiah, "Go, and say to Hezekiah, . . . I have heard thy prayer, I have seen thy tears; behold, I will add unto thy days fifteen years" (v. 5).

These men knew how to pray and how to prevail in prayer. Their faith in prayer was no passing attitude that changed with the wind or with their own feelings and circumstances; it was a fact that God heard and answered, that His ear was ever open to the cry of His children, and that the power to do what was asked of Him was commensurate with His willingness. And thus these men, strong in faith and in prayer, "subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, from weakness were made strong, waxed mighty in war, turned to flight armies of the aliens" (Heb 11:33-34).

Everything then, as now, was possible to the men and women who knew how to pray. Prayer, indeed, opened a limitless storehouse, and God's hand withheld nothing. Prayer introduced those who practiced it into a world of privilege, and brought the strength and wealth of heaven down to the aid of finite man. What rich and wonderful power was theirs who had learned the secret of victorious

approach to God! With Moses it saved a nation; with Ezra it saved a body of believers.

And yet, strange as it seems when we contemplate the wonders of which God's people had been witness, there came a slackness in prayer. The mighty hold upon God, that had so often struck awe and terror into the heart of their enemies, lost its grip. The people, backslidden and apostate, had gone off from their praying, if the bulk of them had ever truly prayed. The Pharisee's cold and lifeless praying was substituted for any genuine approach to God; and because of that formal method of praying, the whole worship became a parody of its real purpose. A glorious dispensation, and gloriously executed was it by Moses, by Ezra, by Daniel and Elijah, by Hannah and Samuel; but the circle seems limited and short-lived; the praying ones were few and far between. They had no survivors, none to imitate their devotion to God, none to preserve the role of the elect.

In vain had the decree established the divine order, the divine call. *Ask of Me*. From the earnest and fruitful crying to God, they turned their faces to pagan gods and cried in vain for the answers that could never come. And so they sank into that godless and pitiful state that has lost its object in life when the link with the eternal has been broken. Their favored dispensation of prayer was forgotten; they knew not how to pray.

What a contrast to the achievements that brighten other pages of Holy Writ! The power working through Elijah and Elisha in answer to prayer reached down even to the very grave. In each case a child was raised from the dead, and the powers of famine were broken. "The supplication of a righteous man availeth much" (Ja 5:16). "Elijah was a man of like passions with us, and he prayed

fervently that it might not rain; and it rained not on the earth for three years and six months. And he prayed again; and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit" (vv. 18-19). Jonah prayed while imprisoned in the great fish, and he came to dry land, saved from storm and sea and monsters of the deep by the mighty energy of his praying.

How wide the gracious provision of the grace of praying as administered in that marvelous dispensation! They prayed wondrously. Why could not their praying save the dispensation from decay and death? Was it not because they lost the fire without which all praying degenerates into a lifeless form? It takes effort and toil and care to prepare the incense. Prayer is no laggard's work. When all the rich, spiced graces from the body of prayer have by labor and beating been blended and refined and intermixed, the fire is needed to unloose the incense and make its fragrance rise to the throne of God. The fire that consumes creates the spirit and life of the incense. Without fire, prayer has no spirit; it is, like dead spices, for corruption and worms.

The casual, intermittent prayer is never bathed in this divine fire. For the man who thus prays is lacking in the earnestness that lays hold of God, determined not to let Him go until the blessing comes. "Pray without ceasing" (1 Th 5:17) counseled the great apostle. That is the habit that drives prayer right into the mortar that holds the building stones together. "You can do more than pray after you have prayed," said the godly Dr. A. J. Gordon, "but you cannot do more than pray until you have prayed." The story of every great Christian achievement is the history of answered prayer.

"The greatest and the best talent that God gives to any

man or woman in this world is the talent of prayer," writes Principal Alexander Whyte. "And the best usury that any man or woman brings back to God when He comes to reckon with them at the end of this world is a life of prayer. And those servants best put their Lord's money 'to the exchangers' who rise early and sit late, as long as they are in this world, ever finding out and ever following after better and better methods of prayer, and ever forming more secret, more steadfast, and more spiritually fruitful habits of prayer, till they literally 'pray without ceasing,' and till they continually strike out into new enterprises in prayer, and new achievements, and new enrichments."

Martin Luther, when once asked what his plans for the following day were, answered: "Work, work, from early until late. In fact, I have so much to do that I shall spend the first three hours in prayer." Cromwell, too, believed in being much upon his knees. Looking on one occasion at the statues of famous men, he turned to a friend and said, "Make mine kneeling, for thus I came to glory."

It is only when the whole heart is gripped with the passion of prayer that the life-giving fire descends, for none but the earnest man gets access to the ear of God.

*When thou feelest thyself most indisposed to prayer yield not to it, but strive and endeavor to pray even when thou thinkest thou canst not pray.*

HILDERSAM

*It was among the Parthians the custom that none was to give their children any meat in the morning before they saw the sweat on their faces, and you shall find this to be*

*God's usual course not to give His children the taste of His delights till they begin to sweat in seeking after them.*

RICHARD BAXTER

*Of all the duties enjoined by Christianity none is more essential and yet more neglected than prayer. Most people consider the exercise a fatiguing ceremony, which they are justified in abridging as much as possible. Even those whose profession or fears lead them to pray, pray with such languor and wanderings of mind that their prayers, far from drawing down blessings, only increase their condemnation.*

FENELON

*The potency of prayer hath subdued the strength of fire; it had bridled the rage of lions, hushed anarchy to rest, extinguished wars, appeased the elements, expelled demons, burst the chains of death, expanded the gates of heaven, assuaged diseases, repelled frauds, rescued cities from destruction, stayed the sun in its course, and arrested the progress of the thunderbolt. Prayer is an all-efficient panoply, a treasure undiminished, a mine which is never exhausted, a sky unobscured by clouds, a heaven unruffled by the storm. It is the root, the fountain, the mother of a thousand blessings.*

CHRYSOSTOM