

MESSAGES TO THE MULTITUDE

BEING

TEN REPRESENTATIVE SERMONS SELECTED AT
MENTONE, AND TWO UNPUBLISHED
ADDRESSES DELIVERED ON
MEMORABLE OCCASIONS

BY

CHARLES HADDON SPURGEON

*“Take my life, and let them be
Filled with messages from Thee ”*

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PUBLISHERS' NOTE.

JUST twelve months ago, Mr. Spurgeon kindly consented to contribute a group of sermons to the present series, but almost immediately afterwards he was seized with critical illness, and it seemed in the early autumn as if he never would be able to carry out his purpose. At the request of the publishers, his brother and colleague, the Rev. J. A. Spurgeon, undertook to make the selection, but towards the end of the year Mr. Spurgeon recovered sufficiently, amid the sunshine of Mentone, to feel a revived interest in the task. He accordingly took the matter once more into his own hands, and in December last selected the majority of these sermons as typical of his pulpit teaching during the entire period of his ministry at the Metropolitan Tabernacle. He showed keen interest in the preparation of the volume for the press, and was busily engaged in the revision of the printed slips, when the sudden return of his illness in an aggravated form compelled him to lay down finally his busy pen. In a letter to the publishers, dated January 12, 1892, he said, "Call the volume 'Messages to the Multitude,'" and he added, "I will write three or four pages of preface." That letter was hardly despatched, when his illness assumed an alarming character, and it is needless to add that the words of greeting which the great preacher had intended to address through these pages to his absent friends remain unwritten. The two concluding addresses were both delivered on special occasions, and neither of them have hitherto been published; they were selected from Mr. Spurgeon's papers preserved in the library at Westwood. The publishers desire to thank the Rev. J. A. Spurgeon for writing a preface to the book, and they are not less indebted to the Rev. J. W. Harrald—Mr. Spurgeon's private secretary and companion at Mentone—for the painstaking and loving care with which he has seen the volume through the press.

PREFACE.

THIS volume has passed—as to the chief part of it—under the author’s own revision. He took much interest in it during the closing weeks of his life, and it is amongst the last of his literary productions. Other hands have put some final touches, but it may be accepted as substantially his own, alike as to authorship and as to the choice of the sermons to represent him amongst the preachers of his age. It is a sad task to compose an introduction to a book which the departed one should himself have penned, but perhaps a brother can fitly say what must have been under those circumstances left unsaid.

The preacher will ever be remembered as the teacher of the people. One who spoke forcefully the thoughts of the great heart of Christendom on the eternal verities of the gospel. As unchangeable in his system of theology as the shape of a circle, and as fixed in principles as the multiplication table; and for the same reasons, that he was resting on fundamental truths which have no variation. Some have deemed this a weakness, and called it a limited range of thought; but in this holy trafficking of truth we are glad he has not had divers weights and measures in his bag. The standard has ever been the shekel of the sanctuary, and therefore fixedly the same. Through the nearly forty years represented in this selection from his ministerial preaching, there are no old terms applied with new and contradictory meaning. The progress—and such there is—has always been in and not out of the truth as it is in Jesus, and this ever along the lines of thought sanctified by the experience and witness of the Church’s leaders ever since apostolic times.

With this unity of creed, the reader will discover a deepening and mellowing of thought and utterance, such as might well be expected from the ripening powers of a great worker and a greater sufferer. The style of the speaker has been advisedly modified in the preparation for the press, to meet the eye rather than the ear of the student of truth. It were a great advantage for some public speakers to be compelled to peruse their own productions after delivery. Here the preacher was continually re-perusing his own treatises with the desire to produce the same impression under altered circumstances. This has affected them somewhat as orations, and has occasionally reduced an oratorical effect, and tamed down the thrilling utterance to a calmer mood more suited to the quiet thought of the closet. But what has been lost to emotion has been richly repaid in unction and spiritual power. This fact must, therefore, be remembered in any comparison with other public speakers of his age. With an unaltered theme, the great preacher has found ample scope for the display of his undoubted talents, both of mind and utterance.

The style of the author is as clear as the day, because illumed all

through with accurate acquaintance with his subject and his own views upon it. In his depths there is no darkness, and in his heights he has not entered the clouds, and yet in both height and depth of thought he has few equals. The range of illustration, metaphor, and information exhibited in the sermons, of which these are a small specimen, is immense; and every art, trade, science, and realm has been laid under tribute to enrich the discourses and enforce the truths. This is the result of no mere accidental possession of natural powers. On the contrary, the accurate scholar of tenacious memory and facile mind has studied carefully, noted down copiously, and by persistent efforts has given the perfected product of much conscientious toil for the benefit of those listening to him. In the earlier years of his preaching, the preparation extended even to the wording of the sermon in almost its entirety, gradually lessening in detail as years ripened the speaker's pulpit powers, but always including a careful and written division of matter, with due arrangement of illustration, argument, and appeal. The freshness of the sermons has thus been maintained by dint of hard work, which is perhaps the main characteristic of what is called genius in every department of human life.

But two other reasons are manifestly to be noted. The preacher was a great Bible student, and honoured his text by expounding it, illustrating it, enforcing it in perfect loyalty to the mind of the Spirit as therein revealed. This textual style ensured a fresh sermon with each portion of the sacred record taken from time to time for review and exposition. But last of all, and chief of all other reasons of his perennial variety—he was a live man, full of the Holy Ghost and power, and spake as the Spirit gave him utterance. On that he relied, and to it he never failed to give all the praise. The same influence which of old gave the revelation of the truth to the first utterers of it, was with him to aid in the exposition of the themes thus first of all penned by an inspiration Divine. The Spirit of all truth was in him, and under a power distinctly given from above he brought forth these many manner of fruits in due season, and thus these leaves in ceaseless verdure have been for the healing of the nations. In this no claim is made beyond that which all truly God-sent and God-helped men will share, but on this we lay the greatest stress of all, as we indicate the reasons for a power which has made this preacher's sermons, both as spoken and perused, a spiritual phenomenon of the age.

May the same Almighty Lord, whom His now departed servant sought to honour, enforce the publication of these truths in their present form as richly as when they were first proclaimed, and make this new issue of them one more memento of the preacher's faithfulness, and of the Master's power to solace, sanctify, and save !

JAMES A. SPURGEON.

METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE,
NEWINGTON BUTTS, S.E.,
April 4, 1892.

“LET US PRAY.”¹

“But it is good for me to draw near to God.”—Ps. lxxiii. 28.

THERE are many ways by which the true believer can “draw near to God.” The gates of the King’s palace are many; and through the love of Jesus, and the grace of His Spirit, it is our delight, by any of these gates of pearl, to enter, and approach our heavenly Father. Foremost among these is communion, that converse which man holds with God; that state of nearness to God, in which our mutual secrets are revealed—our hearts being open unto Him, His heart being manifested to us. Here it is we see the invisible, and hear the unutterable. The outward symbol of fellowship is the sacred Supper of the Lord, at which, by means of simple emblems, we are divinely enabled to feed, after a spiritual sort, upon the flesh and blood of the Redeemer. This is a golden gate of fellowship, a royal road which our feet delight to tread. Blessed are the feet that tread this sunny pathway. But we may as truly draw near to God if with sighs and tears we tread the pathway of penitence, when our desolate spirit longs for His sacred presence, and cries, “Whom have I in heaven but Thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside Thee!” Equally does a firm trust “draw near to God,” for it clings to Him. So often as we read the promise written in Holy Scripture, and are enabled to receive it and rest upon it as the very word of a covenant God, we do really “draw near” to Him.

Nevertheless, *prayer is the best used means of drawing near to God.* You will excuse me, then, if, in considering my text this morning, I confine myself entirely to the subject of prayer. It is in prayer, mainly, that we draw near to God; and certainly by each gracious man it can be said emphatically of prayer, “It is good for me to draw near to God.” Prayer is good for every man who knoweth how to practise that heavenly art, for in it he is privileged “to draw near to God.”

To assist your memories, that the sermon may abide with you in after-days, I shall divide my discourse in a somewhat singular manner. First, I shall look upon my text as being *a touchstone*, by which we may try our prayers, ay, and try ourselves too; then I shall take the text as *a whetstone* to sharpen our desires, to make us more earnest, and more diligent in supplication, because “it is good to draw near to God;” and then I shall have the solemn task, in the last place, of using it as *a tombstone*,

¹ It was the desire of the publishers that the sermons should illustrate different periods of my long ministry, hence this early one has in it allusions to events in the year 1859. It was preached in the Music Hall, Royal Surrey Gardens, November 6, 1859.

with a direful epitaph upon it for those who do not know what it is to draw near to God; since “a prayerless soul is a Christless soul.”

I. First, you may regard my text as A TOUCHSTONE by which you may test your prayers, and try yourselves.

That is not prayer of which it cannot be said that there was in it a drawing near unto God. Come hither, then, with your supplications. I see one coming forward who says, “I am in the daily habit of using a form of prayer both at morning and at evening. I could not be happy if I went abroad before I had first repeated my morning prayer, nor could I rest at night without again going over the holy sentences appointed for use at eventide. Sir, my form is the very best that could possibly be written; it was compiled by a famous bishop and confessor, who was glorified in martyrdom, and ascended to his God in a chariot of flame.” My friend, I am glad, if you use a form of prayer, that you use the best. If we have forms at all, let them be of the most excellent kind. So far so good. But let me ask you a question. I am not about to condemn you for any form you may have used; but tell me now, and tell me honestly from your inmost soul, have you drawn near to God while you have been repeating those words? for if not—oh, solemn thought!—all the prayers you have ever uttered have been an idle mockery. You have said prayers, but you have never prayed in your life. Imagine not that any enchantment resides in any particular set of words. You might as well repeat the alphabet backwards, or the “Abracadabra” of a wizard, as go over the best form in the world, unless there is something more than form in the act. *Have you drawn near to God?* That is the essential point. Suppose that one of us should desire to present a petition to the House of Commons. We wisely ask in what manner the petition should be worded, and we employ the prescribed phrases. Now, suppose that in the morning we rise and read this form, or repeat it to ourselves; and duly conclude with, “And your petitioners will ever pray,” and the like. Imagine that we do the same at night, and the next day, and the next, for many months. What have we done? One day, meeting a member of the House, we accost him, and astonish him by saying, “Sir, I wonder I have never had an answer from the House of Commons; I have been petitioning these last six months, and the form that I used was the most accurate that could be procured.” “But,” says he, “how was your petition presented?” “*Presented!* I had not thought of that; I have repeated the form of petition with much care. Is not that enough?” “No,” he would say. “You may repeat it many a long day before any good comes from it; it is not the repeating it, but the presenting of the petition, and having it pleaded by some able friend, that will get you the boon you desire.” And so it may be, my friend, that you have been repeating collects and prayers; and have ignorantly imagined

that you have prayed, and yet have never prayed because you have not had to do with God in the whole business. Your prayer has never been presented to God. You have not laid it before Jesus, the Great High-priest, and have not asked Him to take it for you into the, sacred place where God abideth, and there to present the petition with His own merits before His Father's throne. I will not bid you cease from your form; but I do beseech you, by the living God, either cease from it or else beg the Holy Spirit to enable you to draw near to God in it. I entreat you not to be vexed with me, so as to take what I may say for a piece of bitter censoriousness. I speak now as God's own messenger in this matter. Your prayer has not been heard, and it neither can nor will be answered unless there be in it a true and real desire "to draw near to God."

"Ah," saith another, "I am pleased to hear these remarks, for I am in the habit of offering extempore prayer every morning and evening, and at other times; and I am pleased to hear you discourage the use of forms of prayer." Mark, I did not speak against forms of prayer; that is not my subject upon this occasion. One class of sinners is always pleased to hear another class of sinners found fault with. You say you offer an extempore supplication. I must bring your prayer to the same touchstone as the former. What is there in the form that you extemporize, that it should be so much better than that which was composed by a man of God of a former age? Possibly your extempore form is not worth a farthing, and if it could be written out in black and white, it might be a disgrace to prayer-makers. That also is no concern of mine just now. I bring you at once to the test—have *you in your prayer drawn near to God?* When you have been on your knees in the morning, have you thought that you were talking to the King of heaven and earth? Have you breathed your desires, not to wandering winds, but to the ear of the Eternal? Have you desired to come to Him, and tell to Him your wants, and have you sought at His hand the answer to your requests? Remember, you have not prayed successfully or acceptably unless you have in prayer endeavoured to draw near to God. Suppose now (to take a case) that I should desire some favour of a friend. I shut myself up alone, and I commence delivering an oration, pleading earnestly for the boon I need. I repeat this at night, and so on month after month, extemporizing appeals to my friend's bounty and goodness. At last I meet my friend, and I tell him that I have been asking a favour of him, and that he has never answered my prayer. "Nay," saith he, "I have never seen you; you have never spoken to me." "Ah, but you should have heard what I said; if you had but heard it, surely it would have moved your heart!"

"Ah," saith he, "but then you did not address it to me! You wrote a letter, you tell me, in moving strains; but did you post the letter? Did you

make sure that it was delivered at my door?” “No, no,” you say; “I kept the letter after I had written it. I never sent it to you.” Now, mark, the case is parallel with your offering extempore prayer without drawing near to God in it. You plead; but if you are not pleading *with God*, to what effect is your pleading? You talk; but if you are not talking to a manifestly present God, to what effect is all your talking? If you do not seek to come near to Him, what have you done? You have offered sacrifice, perhaps; but it has been upon your own high places, and the sacrifice has been an abomination. You have not brought it up to God’s *one* altar; you have not approached the mercy-seat, where is His own visible presence. You have not drawn near to God, and consequently your prayers, though they be multiplied by tens of thousands, are utterly valueless to your soul’s benefit. Drawing near to God is an indispensable requisite in accepted prayer.

But now, lest I should be misunderstood as to this drawing near to God, let me attempt to describe it in its degrees; for all men cannot draw near to God with the same nearness of access. When first the life of grace begins in the soul, you will draw near to God, but it will be *with great fear and trembling*. The soul conscious of guilt, and humbled thereby, is overawed with the solemnity of its position; it is bowed to the earth by a sense of the grandeur of God in whose presence it stands. I remember the first time I sincerely prayed; but the words I used I remember not. Surely there were few enough words in that petition. I had often repeated a form; I had been in the habit of continually repeating it. At last I came really to pray; and then I saw myself standing before God, in the immediate presence of the heart-searching Jehovah, and I said within myself, “I have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth Thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes.” I felt like Esther when she stood before the king, faint and overcome with dread. I was full of penitence of heart, because of His majesty and my sinfulness. I think the only sounds I could utter were rather breathings than words. The only complete sentence was, “God be merciful to me a sinner!” The overwhelming splendour of His majesty, the greatness of His power, the severity of His justice, the immaculate character of His holiness, and all His dreadful grandeur,—these things overpowered my soul, and I fell down in utter prostration of spirit. But there was in that a true and real drawing to God.

If you, who gather in your churches and chapels, did but realize that you are in God’s presence, surely we might expect to see scenes more marvellous than any of the convulsions of the Irish revival. If you knew that God was there, that you were speaking to Him, that in His ear you were offering that oft-repeated confession, “We have done the things

that we ought not to have done, we have left undone the things that we ought to have done,” there would be among you a deep humility and a solemn abasement of spirit, which would prostrate you on your faces. May God grant to us all, as often as we offer prayer of any sort, that we may truly and really draw near to Him, even if it be only in this sense!

In after-life, as the Christian grows in grace, he draws near to God *with joyful trust*. Although he will never forget the solemnity of his position, and will never lose that holy awe which must overshadow a gracious man when he is in the presence of a God who can create or can destroy, yet that fear has all its terror taken out of it; it becomes a holy reverence, and no more a slavish, abject dread. Then the man of God, walking amid the splendours of Deity, and veiling his face, like the glorious cherubim, with those twin wings, the blood and righteousness of Jesus Christ, will, reverent and bowed in spirit, approach the throne. Seeing there the God of love, of goodness, and of mercy, he will realize rather the covenant character of God than His absolute Deity. He will see in God rather His goodness than His greatness, and more of His mercy than of His majesty. Then will the soul, bowing again as reverently as before, enjoy a sacred liberty of intercession; for while humbled in the presence of the Infinite, it will yet be sustained by the happy consciousness of being in the presence of mercy and of love in infinite degree. This is a state to which men reach after they have had their sins forgiven, after they have passed from death unto life: then they come to rejoice in God, and draw near to Him with confidence.

There is yet a third and higher stage, which I fear too few among us ever arrive at; when the child of God, awed by the splendour, and delighting in the goodness of God, sees something which is more enchanting to him than either of these, namely, the fact of his relationship to God; and draws near *with filial boldness*. He sees on the throne, not simply goodness, but his Father's goodness; not merely love, but love which has from all eternity been set upon *him*; love which has made *him* its darling, which has written his name upon its breast; love which for his sake did even deign to die. Then the child of God comes near to the throne of his Father; he taketh hold of his Father's knees, and though conscious of the greatness of the God, yet is he still more alive to the love of the Father, and he cries, "Our Father, hear our prayer and grant our request, for Jesu's sake." In this position it sometimes happens that the child of God may pray in such a way that others cannot understand him at all. If you had heard Martin Luther pray, some of you would have been shocked; and perhaps it would be presumption should you try to imitate him, because Martin Luther was God's own son, and you, alas! may be destitute of sonship. He had a liberty to talk to God as another

man might not. If you are not the son of God, if you have neither regeneration nor adoption, the utmost you can do is to come into the King's court as a humble beggar seeking an alms. But happy is the man who has received his full adoption, and know himself to be born of the Spirit. It were rudeness for anyone to do or to say that to a king which a king's son may freely do and say. There are words of high and hallowed familiarity, and of close and sacred communing between God and His own adopted child, that I could not repeat in a stranger's ear. There are words allowable between God and the purified soul, that are something like what Paul heard in Paradise; things not lawful for a man to utter in public, though in private he knows their sweetness. Ah! my dear hearers, some of you, I doubt not, know more about this than I do; but this I know, it is the happiest moment in our lives when we can go up to our Father and our God in Christ Jesus, and can know and feel of a surety that His infinite love is set on *us*, and that our love is all engrossed by Him. There is an embrace of faith which is as heaven below. No chariots of Amminadib can describe the heavenly rapture. Even Solomon's Song itself, glowing though its figures be, can scarcely reach the mystery—the length, the breadth, the height of the approach to God known by the communing heart, and the condescending revelation of God to the enraptured mind. It is not essential to the success of your prayers that you should come up to this last point. Possibly you never may attain to this eminence of grace. Nor do I even think that it is absolutely necessary that your prayer should come to the second degree to be prevailing prayer. Your drawing near to God should be growingly close; and it will be so if you grow in grace. But, mark well, that you must draw near to God in some one of these three grades—either in a lowly sense of His majesty, or in a delightful consciousness of His goodness, or in a ravishing sense of your own relationship to Him—or else your prayer is as worthless as the chaff which is blown from the threshing-floor. It is as though you whispered to the wind, or uttered a cry to the desert air, where no ear can hear, and no hand can help.

Bring your prayers, then, to this *touchstone*, and may God help you to examine them, and to be honest with yourselves, for your own soul's sake!

II. This must suffice upon the touchstone. We now come to the second head of the discourse, which was THE WHETSTONE, to whet your desires, to make you more anxious to be much in prayer, and to be more earnest in it. "It is good for me to draw near to God."

Now, first and foremost, let us remark that the goodness of prayer does not lie in any merit that there is in prayer itself. There is no merit whatever in prayer; and wherever the idea of the merit of prayer could

come from, one is at a loss to know, except that it must have come from that Popery which is a native weed in every human heart. The Pharisee of old had this notion, and he seems to have bequeathed it to the Church of Rome. The notion that we deserve anything because we pray for it, is absurd and wicked. If a beggar should be always on your doorstep, or should be always meeting you in the street, or stopping you on your journeys, and asking you to give him help, I suppose the last thing you would understand would be the merit of his prayers. You would say, "I can understand their impudence; I can believe their earnestness; I can comprehend their importunity; but as for *merit*, what merit can there be in a beggar's cry?" Remember, your prayers at the best are nothing, apart from the grace of God, but a beggar's cry. Apart from what grace has done for you, you still stand as beggars at the gate of mercy, asking for the dole of God's charity, for the love of Jesus. He gives freely; yet He gives, not because of your prayers, but because of Christ's blood and Christ's merit. Your prayers are the empty vessels into which He puts the alms of His mercy; but the merit by which the mercy comes is in the veins of Christ, and nowhere else. Remember that there can be no merit in a beggar's cry, nor in our prayers.

But now let us note that it nevertheless is good, practically good, for us to pray and draw near to God; and the first thing which should whet our desires in prayer is this: *Prayer explains mysteries*. I utter that first because it is in the psalm. Poor Asaph had been greatly troubled. He had been trying to untie that Gordian knot concerning the righteousness of a providence which permits the wicked to flourish and the godly to be tried; and because he could not untie that knot, he tried to cut it; but he cut his own fingers in the act, and became greatly troubled. He could not understand how it was that God could be just and yet give riches to the wicked while His own people were in poverty. At last Asaph understood it all, for he went into the house of his God, and there he understood their end. Therefore he says, looking back upon his discovery of a clue to this great labyrinth, "It is good for me to draw near to God." Beloved hearers, if you would more clearly understand the Word of God in its knotty points, if you would more fully comprehend the mystery of the gospel of Christ, remember that Christ's scholars must study upon their knees. Depend upon it, the best commentator upon the Word of God is its Author, the Holy Ghost; and if you would know the meaning of Scripture, you must go to Him in prayer. Often, when a verse has staggered me, I have knelt down, and tried to read it over in that position, and some one word in the text has leaped up, and has become the key to the whole passage. To pray yourself into the spirit of the text, and then to employ that Scripture in the way of prayer: that is the way to learn the

sacred Word and its theology. What you learn upon your knees you will never unlearn. That which men teach you, men can unteach you, if I may be allowed the term. If I am merely convinced by my friend's reasoning, a better reasoner may force me in the opposite direction. If I merely hold my doctrinal opinions because they seem to me to be correct, I may be led to think differently another day. But if God's own Holy Spirit has taught me in answer to prayer, I have not learned amiss, and I have so learned that I shall never forget.

Behold, believer, art thou this day in a labyrinth? Whenever thou comest to a turning-point, where there is a road to the right and another to the left, if thou wouldst know which way to go, fall on thy knees, and then rise and pursue thy journey. When thou comest to the next turning-place, fall on thy knees again, and so learn the right road. The one clue to the labyrinths of providence, of doctrinal opinion, and of sacred thought, will be found in the hallowed exercise of prayer, whereby we draw near to God, and so find guidance. Continue much in prayer, and neither Satan nor the world shall deceive you. Behold before you the sacred casket of truth. But where is the key? It hangs upon the silver nail of prayer. Go and reach it down, unlock the casket, and be rich.

A second whetstone for your prayers shall be this: *Prayer brings deliverances*. In an old author I met with the following allegory. As I found it, so I tell it to you. Once upon a time, the King of Jerusalem left his city in the custody of an eminent captain, whose name was Zeal. He gave unto Zeal many choice warriors, to assist him in the protection of the city. Zeal was a right-hearted man, one who never wearied in the day of battle, but would fight all day and all night, even though his sword did cleave to his hand as the blood ran down his arm. But it happened about this time that the King of Arabia, getting unto himself exceeding great hosts and armies, surrounded the city, and prevented any introduction of food for the soldiers, or of ammunition to continue the war. Driven to the last extremity, Captain Zeal called a council of war, and asked the members what course he should take. Many things were proposed, but they all failed to effect the purpose, and they came to the sad conclusion that nothing was before them but the surrender of the city, although upon the hardest terms. Zeal took the resolution of the council of war; but when he read it, he could not bear it. His soul abhorred it. "Better," said he, "to be cut in pieces than surrender. Better for us to be destroyed while we are faithful, than to give up the keys of this royal city." In his great distress he met a friend of his, called Prayer, and Prayer said to him, "Oh, captain, I can deliver this city." Now, Prayer was not a soldier—at least, he did not look much like a warrior, for he wore the garments of a priest. In fact, he was the king's chaplain, and was the priest

of the holy city of Jerusalem. But, nevertheless, this Prayer was a valiant man, and wore armour beneath his robes. “Oh, captain,” said he, “give me three companions, and I will deliver this city—their names must be Sincerity, Importunity, and Faith.” Now these four brave men went out of the city at the dead of night. When the prospects of Jerusalem were the very blackest, they cut their way right through the hosts that surrounded the city. With many wounds and much struggling they made their escape, and travelled all that night as quickly as they could across the plain, to reach the camp of the King of Jerusalem. When they flagged a little, Importunity would hasten them on; and when at any time they grew faint, Faith would give them a drink from his bottle, and they would recover. They came at last to the palace of the great king. The door was shut, but Importunity knocked long, and at last it was opened. Faith stepped in. Sincerity threw himself on his face before the throne of the great *king*; and then Prayer began to speak. He told the king of the great straits in which the beloved city was now placed, the dangers that surrounded it, and the almost certainty that all the brave warriors would be cut in pieces by the morrow. Importunity rehearsed again and again the wants of the city. Faith pleaded hard the royal promise and covenant. At last the king said to Captain Prayer, “Take with thee soldiers, and go back; lo, I am with thee to deliver this city.” At the morning light, just when the day broke—for they had returned more swiftly than could have been expected, for though the journey seemed long in going there, it was very short in coming back, in fact they seemed to have gained time on the road—they arrived before the bulwarks, fell upon the hosts of the King of Arabia, took him prisoner, slew his army, and divided the spoil, and then entered the gates of the city of Jerusalem in triumph. Zeal put a crown of gold upon the head of Prayer, and decreed that henceforth, whenever Zeal went forth to battle, Prayer should be the standard-bearer, and should lead the van. The allegory is full of truth; let him that heareth understand. If we would have deliverance in the hour of need, “Let us pray.” Prayer shall soon bring seasonable and merciful deliverances from the throne of our faithful God. This is the second sharpening of your desires upon the whetstone; let us proceed to the third.

It is written of faith, in that mighty chapter, the eleventh of the Hebrews, that faith “stopped the mouths of lions”, and wrought other wonders; but one singular thing that faith did, which is as great a miracle as any, was this: faith “obtained promises.” The like can be truly said of prayer. *Prayer obtains promises*; therefore “it is good for me to draw near to God.” We read a story in the history of England, whether true or not we cannot tell, that Queen Elizabeth gave to the Earl of Essex a ring, as a token of her favour. “When thou art in disgrace,” she said, “send

this ring to me. When I see it, I will forgive thee, and restore thee again to favour.” You know the story of that ill-fated noble, how he sent the ring by a faithless messenger, and it was never delivered; and therefore he perished at the block. Learn the lesson: our God has given to each one of His people the sacred ring of promise; saying, “As often as thou art in need, show it to Me, and I will deliver thee.” Take heed then, believer, that thou employest a faithful messenger. And what messenger canst thou employ so excellent as true, real, earnest prayer? But take heed it be real prayer; for if thy messenger miscarry, and the promise be not brought to God’s remembrance, thou mayest never obtain the blessing. Draw near to God with living, loving prayer; present the promise, and thou shalt obtain the fulfilment. Brave things might we say of prayer; our old divines are full of encomiums concerning it. The early fathers spake of it as if they were writing sonnets. Chrysostom preached of it as if he saw it incarnate in some heavenly form. The choicest metaphors were gathered together by the saints to describe with rapture the power, nay, the omnipotence, of prayer. Would to God that we loved prayer as our fathers did of old! It is said of James the Less, that he was so much in prayer that his knees had become hard like those of a camel. It may have been only a legend, but legends are often based on truth. Certain it is that Hugh Latimer, that blessed saint and martyr of our God, was accustomed to pray so earnestly in his old age, when he was imprisoned, that he would often pray until he had no strength left to rise, and the prison attendants had need to lift him from his knees. Where see we men like these? O angel of the covenant, where canst thou find them? When the Son of man cometh, shall He find prayer on the earth? Our prayers are not worthy of the name of supplications. Oh, that we had learned that sacred art of drawing near to God, and pleading His promise! Cowper has put several thoughts together in one verse of his hymn. Prayer clears the sky;—

“Prayer makes the darkened cloud withdraw.”

Prayer climbs to heaven;—

“Prayer climbs the ladder Jacob saw.”

Prayer makes the powers of darkness quail;—

“And Satan trembles when he sees
The weakest saint upon his knees.”

I have thus given you three reasons why we should be diligent in prayer. Let me add yet another, for we must not leave this part of the whetstone until we have thoroughly entered into the reasons why “it is good for us to draw near unto God.” Let me remark, that *prayer has a mighty power to sustain the soul in every season of its distress and sorrow*. Whenever your soul becomes weak, use the heavenly strengthening plaster of prayer. It was while He prayed that an angel appeared unto our Lord, and strengthened Him. That angel has appeared to many of us, and we have not forgotten the strength which we received when on our knees. In the ancient mythology they tell of one who, as often as he was thrown down, recovered strength because he touched his mother earth. It is so with the believer. As often as he is thrown down, and falls upon his knees, he recovers himself, for he touches the great source of his strength. If thou hast a heavy burden pressing thy back, be much in prayer, for thou shalt carry it well if thou canst pray. Once on a time, a pilgrim had upon his shoulder a terrible burden, that crushed him to the earth, so that he could not stand upright, but crept along on his hands and knees. There appeared to him a fair and comely damsel, holding in her hand a wand, and she touched the burden. It was there, in all its outward shape and fashion, but without weight. That which had crushed him to the earth had now become so light that he could leap beneath it. Beloved, do you understand this? Have you not gone to God with mountains of trouble on your shoulders, unable to carry them? Have you not seen them remaining in the same shape, but lightened, so as to be no more a load to your heart? They became blessings instead of curses. What you thought was an iron cross, suddenly turned out to be a wooden one, and you carried it with joy, following your Master.

I will give but one other reason, lest I should weary you, and that certainly is not my desire. Beloved, there is one reason why those of us who are engaged in the Lord’s work should be diligent in prayer, and it *is prayer will ensure success*. Two labourers in God’s harvest met each other once upon a time, and they sat down to compare notes. One was a man of sorrowful spirit, and the other joyous, for God had given him the desire of his heart. The sad brother said, “Friend, I cannot understand how it is that everything you do is sure to prosper. You scatter seed with both your hands very diligently, and it springs up plenteously, and so rapidly too, that the reaper treads upon the heels of the sower. I have sown,” said he, “as you have done, and I trust I have been diligent. The soil has been the same, for we have laboured side by side in the same town. The seed has been of the same quality, for I have taken mine where you have taken yours—from the common granary of Holy Scripture. But, alas! *my* seed never springs up. I sow it, and it is as if I sowed

upon the waves. I never see a harvest. Here and there I have discovered, with great and diligent search, a sickly blade of wheat; but small is the reward of my labours.” They talked long together, for the brother who was successful was one of a tender heart, and therefore he sought to comfort his mourning brother. They compared notes; they looked through all the rules of husbandry; but they could not solve the mystery, why one was successful and the other laboured in vain. At last one said to the other, “I must retire.” “Wherefore?” said the other. “Why, this is the time,” said he, “when I must go alone to steep my seed.” “Steep your seed?” said the other. “Yes, my brother, I always steep my seed before I sow it. I steep it till it begins to swell, and germinate, and I can almost see a green blade springing from it; and then you know it speedily grows after it is sown.” “Ah,” said the other, “but I understand not what you mean! How do you steep your seed, and in what mysterious mixture?” “Brother,” said he, “it is a composition made of one part of the tears of agony for the souls of men, and the other part of drops of the cordial of confidence in God as the Hearer of prayer: this mixture, if you drop your seed in it, hath a transcendent efficacy to quicken the growth of every grain, so that none of it is lost.” The other rose, and went on his way, and forgot not what he had learned, for he too began to steep his seed. He spent less time in his study, and more in his closet. He was less abroad, and more at home; less with man, and more with God. He went to the field, and scattered his seed; and he, too, saw a harvest, and the Lord was glorified in them twain.

Brethren, I do feel this with regard to myself; and, therefore, when I speak of others, I speak not uncharitably, that the reason of the non-success of many ministries will be found in restraining prayer. If I were addressing students in the college, I should say to them, Set prayer first in your labours; let your subject be well prepared; think out well your discourse; but best of all, pray over it. Study on your knees. Speaking to the present assembly, containing Sabbath-school teachers, and others who in their way are labouring for Christ, let me beseech you, whatever you do, go not about your work except you have first saturated your soul and your seed with the spirit of prayer. We are in these days demanding more labourers—it is a right prayer: our Saviour bade us pray the Lord of the harvest to thrust out more labourers. We are seeking that the Word preached should be of the best sort—it is a right demand. But let us not forget to ask of God that men may be led to preach, agonizing for souls while they speak. I like to preach with a burden on my heart—the burden of other men’s sins, the burden of other men’s hard-heartedness, the burden of their unbelief, the burden of their desperate estate, which must

ere long end in perdition unless they repent. There is no preaching, I am persuaded, like that; for then we preach as though—

“We ne'er might preach again,
As dying men to dying men.”

May each of you labour as those who live near to God, whose very breath is prayer, and whose dependence is upon heavenly help! Commit your work to God, and you will find it good to draw near to Him.

I will tell you here an incident of the revival. It is one I know to be correct; it is told by a good brother who would not add a word thereunto, I am sure. It happened, not long ago, that, in a school which is sustained by the Corporation of the City of London, in the north of Ireland, one of the older boys had been converted to God; and one day, in the midst of school, a smaller lad was greatly oppressed by a sense of sin, and so overwhelmed did he become that the master plainly perceived that he could not work, and therefore he said to him, “You had better go home, and plead with God in prayer in private.” He said, however, to the bigger boy, who was all rejoicing in hope, “Go with him; take him home, and pray with him.” They started together. On the road they saw an empty house; the two boys went in, and there began to pray; the plaintive cry of the younger one after a little time changed into a note of joy, when, suddenly springing up, he said, “I have found rest in Jesus; I have never felt as I do now. My sins, which are many, are all forgiven.” The proposal was to go home; but the younger lad forbade this. No, he must go back, and tell the master of the school that he had found Christ. So, hurrying back, he rushed in, and said, “Oh! sir, I have found the Lord Jesus Christ.” All the boys in the school, who had seen him sitting sad and dull upon the form, remarked the joy that flashed from his eye when he cried, “I have found Christ.” The effect was electric. The boys suddenly and mysteriously disappeared; the master knew not where they were gone; but, looking over into the playground, he saw by the wall a number of boys, in prayer asking for mercy, one by one. He said to the elder youth, “Cannot you go and tell these boys the way of salvation? Run and tell them what they must do to be saved.” He did so, and the prayer that was being offered was suddenly changed into a loud piercing shriek; the boys understood what this cry meant, and, impelled by the great Spirit, they all fell on their knees, and began to plead for mercy through the blood of Christ. But this was not all. There was a girls' schoolroom in the same building overhead, and the girls too became affected by the same Spirit; and began to cry aloud for the forgiveness of their sins. Here was an interruption for school! Was ever such a thing known before in a school-

room? Classes were all put aside, and books forgotten, while poor sinners were kneeling at the foot of the cross, seeking for pardon. The cry was heard throughout the various offices attached to this large school, and it was heard also across the street, and passers-by were attracted. Men of God, ministers and clergymen of the neighbourhood, were brought in; the whole day was spent in prayer, and they continued until almost midnight. They separated with songs of joy, for it was believed that the girls and boys, and men and women, who had crowded the two schoolrooms, had all found the Saviour.

Our good brother, Dr. Arthur, says that, while travelling in Ireland, he met with a youth, and he said to him, "Do you love the Saviour?" And he answered, "I trust I do." "How did you come to love Him?" "Oh," said he, "I was converted in the big schoolroom that night! My mother heard that there was a revival going on there, and she sent me to fetch my little brother away; she did not want him, she said, to get convinced. I went to fetch away my brother, but he was on his knees, crying, 'Lord, have mercy upon me, a sinner!' I stopped, and I prayed too, and the Lord saved us both." Now, to what are we to attribute this? I know many of the brethren there—Presbyterian ministers and others—and I do not think there is any superiority in their ministry over that which is common in London. They themselves would subscribe to the truth of what I assert. The difference is this: there has been prayer for Ireland. Living, hearty prayer has been offered continually, perhaps, by some who do not live in Ireland, but have laid that island to heart. God alone knows where that revival really began. Some woman on her bed may have been exercised in her soul for that district, and may have been wrestling with God in prayer; and then the blessing has descended. If God shall help you and me to bear upon our hearts the neighbourhood in which we live, the family over which we preside, the congregation we have to address; the class we have to teach, the labourers we employ, or any of these; surely then by mighty prayer we shall bring down a great blessing upon them from on high. Prayer is never lost; preaching *may* be, but prayer *never* is. Praying breath can ne'er be spent in vain. The Lord send to all the Churches of Great Britain, first of all, the power of prayer, and then conversions by tens of thousands, through the outpoured energy of the Holy One of Israel!

III. I have little time for the third point, further than to remark that, while I have been preaching, I do hope that many have heard for themselves; and have begun to pray. If so, there will be the less need to dwell upon the sorrowful business of setting up A TOMBSTONE. Alas for those who do not pray, for in truth they do not *live* in the best sense of life!

Ah, my hearers, religion is more solemn work than some men think it to be! I am often shocked with the brutality of what are called the lower classes of society, and with their coarse blasphemies; but there is one thing more shocking still, and that is, the frivolous way in which the mass of our higher classes spend their time. How little worth the doing is even attempted by numbers of the wealthy! A round of calls is frequently a mere pretence for wasting time. What are most amusements but an attempt to kill the time that hangs laboriously on idle hands? What are many of your employments but an industrious idleness, wasting precious hours, which, God knows, will be few enough when you come to look back upon them from a dying bed? Oh! if you did but know your high destiny, many of you would no longer waste your time in the paltry things that occupy your hands, and enslave your souls. God Almighty forgive those wasted hours which, if you be Christians, ought to be employed for the good of others! God forgive those moments of frivolity which ought to have been occupied in prayer! If such a congregation as this could but be solemnly alive to the interests of this land, and the poverty of it, to its miseries, to its wickedness, what results might come of it! If but such a host as I have here could solemnly begin to pray “Thy kingdom come,” how much would be attempted and achieved! This would be the best form of Missionary Society. So many hearts full of tenderness and affection, all beating high with anxious desire to see sinners brought to Christ! Though we cannot approve of the doctrines of the Romish Church, we sometimes stand abashed at its zeal. Would God that we had sisters of mercy who were merciful indeed; not dressed in fanciful garb, but yet going from house to house, to comfort the sick, and help the needy! Would that you all were Brothers of the Heart of Jesus, or Sisters of the Compassionate One, whose mother’s heart was pierced with agony, when He died, that we might be saved. This I speak with an earnest anxiety that the words may be prophetic of a better age.

Certain of you have never prayed in your lives, toying like glittering insects, wasting your little day. You know not that death is near you. If you have never sought and have never found the Saviour, how terrible is your danger! However bright those eyes, if they have never seen the wounds of Christ, if they have never looked to Jesus, they shall not simply be sealed in death, but they must eternally behold sights of fearful woe. May God grant you grace to pray; may He lead each one of you home to your house, to fall on your knees, and for the first time to cry, “Lord, have mercy upon me!” Remember, you have sins to confess, and if you think you have not, you are in a sad state of heart; it proves that you are dead in trespasses and sins—yes, *dead* in them. Go home, and ask the Lord to give you a new heart and a right spirit; and may He who

will inspire the prayer graciously hear it at once! May you, and I, and all of us, when this life has passed away, and time is exchanged for eternity, stand before the throne of God at last, “accepted in the Beloved”! I have to preach continually to a congregation in which I know there are many drunkards, swearers, and the like—with these men I know how to deal, and God has given me success; but I sometimes tremble for you amiable, excellent, upright daughters, who make glad your father’s house, and I fear for you wives who train up your children tenderly. Remember, if you have not the root of the matter in you, outward religion will not avail. “Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” You must draw near to God in simple, penitent faith, or you will not find eternal good. As I must be honest with the poor, so must I be with the rich; and I must tell you that you must be converted, and become as little children, or you cannot enter the kingdom of heaven. As we must lay the axe to the root of the tree with the drunkard and the swearer, so must we with you. You are as much lost as they are, and shall as surely perish as they do, unless you are born again. There is but one road to heaven for you all alike. As a minister of the gospel, I know no rich men and no poor men; I know no working classes and no gentlemen; I know simply God’s sinful creatures, bidden to come to Christ and find mercy through His atonement. He will not reject you; put the black thought away. He is able to save; doubt Him not. Come to Him; come and welcome. God help you to draw near to Him at once, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.