

PRAYER AND THE PRAYER MEETING

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IN considering the deeply important subject of prayer, two things claim our attention: first, the moral basis of prayer; secondly, its moral conditions.

1 The Moral Basis of Prayer

1. The basis of prayer is set forth in such words as the following: "If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you." (John xv. 7.) Again, "Beloved, 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 pleasing in his sight." (1 John iii. 21, 22.) So also, when the blessed apostle seeks an interest in the prayers of the saints, he sets forth the moral basis of his appeal Pray for us ; for we trust we have a good conscience, in all things willing to live honestly." (Heb. xiii. 18.)

From these passages, and many more of like import, we learn that, in order to effectual prayer, there must be an obedient heart, an upright mind, a good conscience. If the soul be not in communion with God if it be not abiding in Christ if it be not ruled by His holy commandments if the eye be not single, how could we possibly look for answers to our prayers I We should, as the apostle James says, be "asking amiss, that we may consume it upon our lusts." How could God, as a holy Father, grant such petitions? Impossible.

How very needful, therefore, it is to give earnest heed to the moral basis on which our prayers are presented. How could the apostle have asked the brethren to pray for him, if he had not a good conscience, a single eye, an upright mind the moral persuasion that in all things he really wished to live honestly? We may safely assert, he could do no such thing.

But may we not often detect ourselves in the habit of lightly and formally asking others to pray for us? It is a very common formulary amongst us "Remember me in your prayers," and most surely nothing can be more blessed or precious than to be borne upon the hearts of God's dear people in their approaches to the mercy-seat; but do we sufficiently attend to the moral basis? When we say, "Brethren, pray for us," can we add, as in the presence of the Searcher of hearts, For we trust we have a good conscience, in all things willing to live honestly"? And when we ourselves bow before the throne of grace, is

it with an uncondemning heart an upright mind - a single eye a soul really abiding in Christ, and keeping His commandments?

These, beloved reader, are searching questions. They go right to the very centre of the heart down to the very roots and moral springs of our being. But it is well to be thoroughly searched - searched in reference to everything, but especially in reference to prayer. There is a terrible amount of unreality in our prayers a sad lack of the moral basis a vast amount of "asking amiss."

Hence, the want of power and efficacy in our prayers hence, the formality the routine yea, the positive hypocrisy. The psalmist says, "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me." How solemn this is! Our God will have reality, He desireth truth in the inward parts. He, blessed be His name, is real with us, and He will have us real with Him. He will have us coming before Him, as we really are, and with what we really want.

How often, alas! it is otherwise, both in private and in public! How often are our prayers more like orations than petitions more like statements of doctrine than utterances of need! It seems, at times, as though we meant to explain principles to God, and give Him a large amount of information.

These are the things which cast a withering influence over our prayer meetings, robbing them of their freshness, their interest, and their value. Those who really know what prayer is who feel its value, and are conscious of their need of it, attend the prayer meeting in order to pray, not to hear orations, lectures, and expositions from men on their knees. If they want lectures, they can attend at the lecture hall or the preaching-room; but when they go to the prayer-meeting, it is to pray. To them, the prayer meeting is the place of expressed need and expected blessing - the place of expressed weakness and expected power. Such is their idea of "the place where prayer is wont to be made;" and therefore when they flock thither, they are not disposed or prepared to listen to long preaching prayers, which would be deemed barely tolerable if delivered from the desk, but which are absolutely insufferable in the shape of prayer.

We write plainly, because we feel the need of great plainness of speech. We deeply feel our want of reality, sincerity, and truth in our prayers and prayer meetings. Not unfrequently it happens that what we call prayer is not prayer at all, but the fluent utterance of certain known and acknowledged truths and principles, to which one has listened so often that the reiteration becomes tiresome in the extreme. What can be more painful than to hear a man on his knees explaining principles and unfolding doctrines? The question forces itself upon us, "Is the man speaking to God, or to us?" If to God, surely nothing can be more irreverent or profane than to attempt to explain things to Him; but if to us, then it is not prayer at all, and the sooner we rise from the attitude of prayer the better, inasmuch as the speaker will do better on his legs and we in our seats.

And, having referred to the subject of attitude, we would very lovingly call attention to a matter which, in our judgment demands a little serious consideration; we allude to the habit of sitting during the holy and solemn exercise of prayer. We are fully aware, of course, that the grand question in prayer is, to have the heart in a right attitude. And further, we know, and would ever

bear in mind, that many who attend our prayer-meetings are aged, infirm, and delicate people, who could not possibly kneel for any length of time perhaps not at all. Then again, it often happens that, even where there is net physical weakness, and where there would be real desire to kneel down, as feeling it to be the proper attitude, yet from actual want of space, it is impossible to change one's position.

All these things must be taken into account; but, allowing as broad a margin as possible in which to insert these modifying clauses, we must still hold to it that there is a very deplorable lack of reverence in many of our public reunions for prayer. We frequently observe young men, who can neither plead physical weakness nor want of space, sitting through an entire prayer-meeting. This, we confess, is offensive, and we cannot but believe it grieves the Spirit of the Lord. We ought to kneel down when we can; it expresses reverence and prostration. The blessed Master "kneeled down and prayed." (Luke xxii. 41.) His apostle did the same, as we read in Acts xx. 36, "When he had thus spoken, he kneeled down and prayed with them all."

And is it not comely and right so to do? Assuredly it is. And can aught be more unseemly than to see a number of people, sitting, lolling, lounging, and gaping about while prayer is being offered? We consider it perfectly shocking, and we do here most earnestly beseech all the Lord's people to give this matter their solemn consideration, and to endeavour, in every possible way, both by precept and example, to promote the godly habit of kneeling at our prayer-meetings. No doubt those who take part in the meeting would greatly aid in this matter by short and fervent prayers; but of this, more hereafter.

2 The Moral Conditions of Prayer

WE shall now proceed to consider, in the light of the holy scripture, the moral conditions or attributes of prayer. There is nothing like having the authority of the divine word for everything in the entire range of our practical christian life. Scripture must be our one grand and conclusive referee in all questions. Let us never forget this.

2.1 United Prayer

What, then, saith the scripture as to the necessary moral conditions of prayer? Turn to Matthew xviii. 19 "Again I say unto you, that if two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven."

Here we learn that one necessary condition of our prayers is, unanimity - cordial agreement - thorough oneness of mind. The true force of the words is, "If two of you shall symphonise" shall make one common sound. There must be no jarring note, no discordant element.

If, for example, we come together to pray about the progress of the gospel, the conversion of souls, we must be of one mind in the matter we must make

one common sound before our God. It will not do for each to have some special thought of his own to carry out. We must come before the throne of grace in holy harmony of mind and spirit, else we cannot claim an answer, on the ground of Matthew xviii. 19.

Now this is a point of immense moral weight. Its importance, as bearing upon the tone and character of our prayer-meetings, cannot possibly be over-estimated. It is very questionable indeed whether any of us have given sufficient attention to it. Have we not to deplore the objectless character of our prayer-meetings? Ought we not to come together more with some definite object on our hearts, as to which we are going to wait together upon God? We read in the first chapter of Acts, in reference to the early disciples, "These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren."¹ And again, in the second chapter, we read, "When the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place."

They were waiting, according to the Lord's instructions, for the promise of the Father - the gift of the Holy Ghost. They had the sure word of promise. The Comforter was, without fail, to come; but this, so far from dispensing with prayer, was the very ground of its blessed exercise. They prayed; they prayed in one place; they prayed with one accord. They were thoroughly agreed. They all, without exception, had one definite object before their hearts. They were waiting for the promised Spirit; they continued to wait; and they waited with one accord, until He came. Men and women, absorbed with one object, waited in holy concord, in happy symphony waited on, day after day, earnestly, fervently, harmoniously waited until they were indued with the promised power from on high.

Should not we go and do likewise? Is there not a sad lack of this "one accord," "one place" principle in our midst? True it is, blessed be God, we have not to ask for the Holy Ghost to come. He has come; we have not to ask for the outpouring of the Spirit. He has been poured out: but we have to ask for the display of His blessed power in our midst. Supposing our lot is cast in a place where spiritual death and darkness reign. There is not so much as a single breath of life - not a leaf stirring. The heaven above seems like brass; the earth beneath, iron. Such a thing as a conversion is never heard of. A withering formalism seems to have settled down upon the entire place. Powerless profession, dead routine, stupefying mechanical religiousness, are the order of the day. What is to be done? Are we to allow ourselves to fall under the fatal influence of the surrounding malaria? are we to yield to the paralyzing power of the atmosphere that inwraps the place? Assuredly not.

If not, what then? Let us, even if there be but two who really feel the condition of things, get together, with one accord, and pour out our hearts to God. Let us wait on Him in holy concord, with united, firm purpose, until He

¹How interesting to find "Mary the mother of Jesus" named here, and, as it were, singled out from the other women! Who can fail to see the farseeing wisdom of the Holy Ghost in this? Mary felt her need of prayer and the prayer-meeting. What would she have said if any one had told her that millions of professing Christians would yet be praying to her?

send a copious shower of blessing upon the barren spot. Let us not fold our arms and vainly say, "The time is not come." Let us not yield to that pernicious offshoot of a one-sided theology, which is rightly called fatalism, and say, "God is sovereign, and He works according to His own will. We must wait His time. Human effort is in vain. We cannot get up a revival. We must beware of mere excitement."

All this seems very plausible; and the more so because there is a measure of truth in it; indeed it is all true, so far as it goes : but it is only one side of the truth. It is truth, and nothing but the truth; but it is not the whole truth. Hence its mischievous tendency. There is nothing more to be dreaded than one-sided truth; it is far more dangerous than positive, palpable, error. Many an earnest soul has been stumbled and turned completely out of the way by one-sided or misapplied truth. Many a true-hearted and useful workman has been chilled, repulsed, and driven out of the harvest-field by the injudicious enforcement of certain doctrines having a measure of truth, but not the full truth of God.

Nothing, however, can touch the truth, or weaken the force of Matthew xviii. 19. It stands in all its blessed fulness, freeness, and preciousness before the eye of faith; its terms are clear and unmistakable. "If two of you shall agree upon earth, as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven." Here is our warrant for coming together to pray for anything that may be laid on our hearts. Do we mourn over the coldness, barrenness, and death around us ? Are we discouraged by the little apparent fruit from the preaching of the gospel the lack of power in the preaching itself, and the total absence of practical result? Are our souls cast down by the barrenness, dulness, heaviness, and low tone of all our reunions, whether at the table of our Lord, before the mercy-seat, or around the fountain of holy scripture?

What are we to do? Fold our arms in cold indifference? give up in despair? or give vent to complaining, murmuring, fretfulness, or irritation? God forbid! What then 3 Come together, "with one accord in one place;" get down on our faces before our God, and pour out our hearts, as the heart of one man, pleading Matthew xviii. 19.

This, we may rest assured, is the grand remedy the unfailing resource. It is perfectly true that "God is sovereign," and this is the very reason why we should wait on Him; perfectly true that "human effort is in vain," and that is the very reason for seeking divine power; perfectly true that "we cannot get up a revival," and that is the very reason for seeking to get it down; perfectly true that "we must beware of mere excitement;" equally true that we must beware of coldness, deadness, and selfish indifference.

The simple fact is, there is no excuse whatever so long as Christ is at the right hand of God so long as God the Holy Ghost is in our midst and in our hearts so long as we have the word of God in our hands so long as Matthew xviii. 19 shines before our eyes there is, we repeat, no excuse whatever for barrenness, deadness, coldness, and indifference no excuse for heavy and unprofitable meetings no excuse whatever for lack of freshness in our reunions or of fruitfulness in our service. Let us wait on God, in holy concord, and the

blessing is sure to come.

2.2 Believing Prayer

IF we turn to Matthew xxi. 22, we shall find another of the essential conditions of effectual prayer. "And all things whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive." This is a truly marvellous statement. It opens the very treasury of heaven to faith. There is absolutely no limit. Our blessed Lord assures us that we shall receive whatsoever we ask in simple faith.

The apostle James, under the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, gives us a similar assurance in reference to the matter of asking for wisdom. "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. But " here is the moral condition "let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea, driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall obtain anything of the Lord."

From both these passages we learn that if our prayers are to have an answer, they must be prayers of faith. It is one thing to utter words in the form of prayer, and another thing altogether to pray in simple faith, in the full, clear, and settled assurance that we shall have what we are asking for. It is greatly to be feared that many of our so-called prayers never go beyond the ceiling of the room. In order to reach the throne of God, they must be borne on the wings of faith, and proceed from hearts united and minds agreed, in holy purpose, to wait on our God for the things which we really require.

Now the question is, are not our prayers and prayer-meetings sadly deficient on this point? Is not the deficiency manifest from the fact, that we see so little result from our prayers? Ought we not to examine ourselves as to how far we really understand these two conditions of prayer, namely, unanimity and confidence? If it be true and it is true, for Christ has said it - that two persons agreed to ask in faith can have whatsoever they ask, why do we not see more abundant answers to our prayers? Must not the fault be in us? are we not deficient in concord and confidence?

Our Lord, in Matthew xviii. 19, comes down, as we say, to the very smallest plurality the smallest congregation - even to "two;" but of course the promise applies to dozens, scores, or hundreds. The grand point is, to be thoroughly agreed and fully persuaded that we shall get what we are asking for. This would give a different tone and character altogether to our reunions for prayer. It would make them very much more real than our ordinary prayer meeting, which, alas! alas! is often poor, cold, dead, objectless, and desultory, exhibiting anything but cordial agreement and unwavering faith.

How vastly different it would be if our prayer meetings were the result of a cordial agreement on the part of two or more believing souls, to come together and wait upon God for a certain thing, and to persevere in prayer until they receive an answer How little we see of this! We attend the prayer meeting from week to week and very right we should but ought we not to be exercised before God as to how far we are agreed in reference to the object or objects which

are to be laid before the throne? The answer to this question links itself on to another of the moral conditions of prayer.

Let us turn to Luke xi. "And he said unto them, Which of you shall have a friend, and shall go unto him at midnight, and say unto him, Friend, lend me three loaves; for a friend of mine in his journey is come to me, and I have nothing to set before him? And he from within shall answer and say, Trouble me not; the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot rise and give thee. I say unto you, though he will not rise and give him because he is his friend, yet because of his importunity he will rise and give him as many as he needeth. And I say unto you, Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened." (Vers. 5-10.)

These words are of the very highest possible importance, inasmuch as they contain part of our Lord's reply to the request of His disciples, "Lord, teach us to pray." Let no one imagine for a moment that we would dare to take it upon ourselves to teach people how to pray. God forbid! Nothing is further from our thoughts. We are merely seeking to bring the souls of our readers into direct contact with the word of God—the veritable sayings of our blessed Lord and Master—so that, in the light of those sayings, they may judge for themselves as to how far our prayers and our prayer-meetings come up to the divine standard.

What, then, do we learn from Luke xi.? what are the moral conditions which it sets before us? In the first place, it teaches us to be definite in our prayers. "Friend, lend me three loaves." There is a positive need felt and expressed; there is the one thing before the mind and on the heart, and to this one thing he confines himself. It is not a long, rambling, desultory statement about all sorts of things: it is distinct, direct, and pointed. I want three loaves, I cannot do without them, I must have them, I am shut up, the case is urgent, the time of night—all the circumstances give definiteness and earnestness to the appeal. He cannot wander from the one point, "Friend, lend me three loaves."

No doubt it seems a very untoward time to come—"midnight." Everything looks discouraging. The friend has retired for the night, the door is shut, his children are with him in bed, he cannot rise. All this is very depressing; but still the definite need is pressed: he must have the three loaves.

Now, we cannot but judge that there is a great practical lesson here which may be applied, with immense profit, to our prayers and prayer-meetings. Must we not admit that our reunions for prayer suffer sadly from long, rambling, desultory prayers? Do we not frequently give utterance to a whole host of things of which we do not really feel the need, and which we have no notion of waiting for at all? Should we not sometimes be taken very much aback were the Lord to appear to us at the close of our prayer meeting and ask us, What do you really want Me to give, or to do?

To feel most thoroughly persuaded that all this demands our serious consideration. We believe it would impart great earnestness, freshness, glow, depth, reality, and power to our prayer-meetings were we to attend with something definite on our hearts, as to which we could invite the fellowship of our brethren.

Some of us seem to think it necessary to make one long prayer about all sorts of things many of them very right and very good, no doubt but the mind gets bewildered by the multiplicity of subjects. How much better to bring some one object before the throne, earnestly urge it, and pause, so that the Holy Spirit may lead out others, in like manner, either for the same thing or something else equally definite.

Long prayers are often wearisome; indeed, in many cases, they are a positive infliction. It will perhaps be said that we must not prescribe any time to the Holy Spirit. True indeed; away from us be the thought ! Who would venture upon such a piece of daring blasphemy ? We are simply comparing what we find in scripture (where their brief pointedness is characteristic see Matt. vi., John xvii., Acts iv. 24-30, Eph. i., iii., etc.) with what we too often not always, thank God! find in our prayer-meetings.

Let it, then, be distinctly borne in mind that "long prayers" are not the rule in scripture. They are referred to in Mark xii. 40, etc., in terms of withering disapproval. Brief, fervent, pointed prayers impart great freshness and interest to the prayer meeting; but, on the other hand, as a general rule, long and desultory prayers exert a most depressing influence upon all.

2.3 Importunity in Prayer

But there is another very important moral condition set forth in our Lord's teaching in Luke xi., and that is "importunity." He tells us that the man succeeds in gaining his object simply by his importunate earnestness. He is not to be put off; he must get the three loaves. Importunity prevails even where the claims of friendship prove inoperative. The man is bent on his object; he has no alternative. There is a demand, and he has nothing to meet it "I have nothing to set before my travelling friend." In short, he will not take a refusal.

Now, the question is, how far do we understand this great lesson? It is not, blessed be God, that He will ever answer us "from within." He will never say to us, "Trouble me not" - "I cannot rise and give thee." He is ever our true and ready "Friend" "a cheerful, liberal, and unupbraiding Giver." All praise to His holy name! Still, He encourages importunity. And we need to ponder His teaching. There is a sad lack of it in our prayer meetings. Indeed, it will be found, that in proportion to the lack of definiteness is the lack of importunity. The two go very much together. Where the thing sought is as definite as the "three loaves," there will generally be the importunate asking for it, and the firm purpose to get it.

The simple fact is, we are too vague and, as a consequence, too indifferent in our prayers and prayer meetings. We do not seem like people asking for what they want, and waiting for what they ask. This is what destroys our prayer-meetings, rendering them pithless, pointless, powerless; turning them into teaching or talking-meetings, rather than deep-toned, earnest prayer-meetings. We feel convinced that the whole church of God needs to be thoroughly aroused in reference to this great question; and this conviction it is which compels us to offer these hints and suggestions, with which we are not yet done.

2.4 Persevere in Prayer

THE more deeply we ponder the subject which has been engaging our attention, and the more we consider the state of the entire church of God, the more convinced we are of the urgent need of a thorough awakening everywhere in reference to the question of prayer. We cannot nor do we desire to - shut our eyes to the fact, that deadness, coldness, and barrenness seem as a rule to characterise our prayer meetings. No doubt we may find here and there a pleasing exception, but speaking generally, we do not believe that any sober, spiritual person will call in question the truth of what we state, namely, that the tone of our prayer meetings is fearfully low, and that it is absolutely imperative upon us to inquire seriously as to the cause.

In the foregoing pages, we have ventured to offer to our readers a few hints and suggestions. We have briefly glanced at our lack of confidence, our failure in cordial unanimity, the absence of definiteness and importunity. We have referred in plain terms and we must speak plainly if we are to speak at all to many things which are felt by all the truly spiritual amongst us to be not only trying and painful, but thoroughly subversive of the real power and blessing of our reunions for prayer. We have spoken of the long, tiresome, desultory, preaching prayers which, in some cases, have become so perfectly intolerable, that the Lord's dear people are scared away from the prayer-meetings altogether. They feel that they are only wearied, grieved, and irritated, instead of being refreshed, comforted, and strengthened; and hence they deem it better to stay away. They judge it to be more profitable, if they have an hour to spare, to spend it in the privacy of their closet, where they can pour out their hearts to God in earnest prayer and supplication, than to attend a so-called prayer meeting, where they are absolutely wearied out with incessant, powerless, hymn-singing, or long preaching prayers.

New, we more than question the rightness of such a course. We seriously doubt if this be at all the way to remedy the evils of which we complain. Indeed, we are thoroughly persuaded it is not. If it be right to come together for prayer and supplication - and who will question the rightness? - then surely it is not right for any one to stay away merely because of the feebleness, failure, or even the folly of some who may take part in the meeting. If all the really spiritual members were to stay away on such a ground, what would become of the prayer meeting? We have very little idea of how much is involved in the elements which compose a meeting. Even though we may not take part audibly in the action, yet if we are there in a right spirit - there really to wait upon God, we marvelously help the tone of a meeting.

Besides, we must remember that we have something more to do in attending a meeting than to think of our own comfort, profit, and blessing. We must think of the Lord's glory; we must seek to do His blessed will, and try to promote the good of others in every possible way; and neither of these ends, we may rest assured, can be attained by our deliberately absenting ourselves from the place where prayer is wont to be made.

We repeat, and with emphasis, the words, "deliberately absenting ourselves"

- staying away because we are not profited by what takes place there. many things may crop up to hinder our being present - ill-health, domestic duties, lawful claims upon our time if we are in the employment of others, - all these things have to be taken into account; but we may set it down as a fixed principle that the one who can designedly absent himself from the prayer meeting is in a bad state of soul. The healthy, happy, earnest, diligent soul will be sure to be found at the prayer meeting.

But all this conducts us, naturally and simply, to another of those moral conditions at which we have been glancing in this series of papers. Let us turn for a moment to the opening lines of Luke 18. "And He spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint: saying, 'There was in a city a judge, which feared not God, neither regarded man. And there was a widow in that city, and she came unto him, saying, Avenge me of mine adversary. And he would not for a while; but afterward he said within himself, Though I fear not God, nor regard man, yet, because this widow troubleth me, I will avenger her, lest by her continual coming she weary me.'" And the Lord said, "Hear what the unjust judge saith. And shall not God avenge His own elect, which cry day and night unto Him, though He bear long with them? I tell you that He will avenge them speedily" (ver. 1-8)

Here then, we have pressed upon our attention the important moral condition of perseverance. "Men ought always to pray, and not to faint." This is intimately connected with the definiteness and importunity to which we have already referred. We want a certain thing; we cannot do without it. We importunately, unitedly, believingly, and perseveringly wait on our God until He graciously sends an answer, as He most assuredly will, if the moral basis and the moral conditions be duly maintained.

But we must persevere. We must not faint, and give up, though the answer does not come as speedily as we might expect. It may please God to exercise our souls by keeping us waiting on Him for days, months, or perhaps years. The exercise is good. It is morally healthful ; it tends to make us real ; it brings us down to the roots of things. Look, for example, at Daniel. He was kept for " three full weeks " waiting on God, in profound exercise of soul. "In those days I Daniel was mourning three full weeks. I ate no pleasant bread, neither , came flesh nor wine in my mouth, neither did I anoint myself at all, till three full weeks were fulfilled."

All this was good for Daniel. There was deep blessing in the spiritual exercise through which this beloved and honoured servant of God was called to pass during those three weeks. And what is specially worthy of note is, that the answer to Daniel's cry had been despatched from the throne of God at the very beginning of his exercise, as we read at verse 12, "Then said he unto me, Fear not, Daniel; for from the first day that thou didst set thine heart to understand, and to chasten thyself before thy God, thy words were heard, and am come for thy words. But" how marvellous and mysterious is this! "the prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me one and twenty days; but, lo, Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me; and I remained there with the kings of Persia. Now I am come to make thee understand what shall befall thy people

in the latter days.”

All this is full of interest. Here was the beloved servant of God mourning, chastening himself, and waiting upon God. The angelic messenger was on his way with the answer. The enemy was permitted to hinder ; but Daniel continued to wait: he prayed, and fainted not; and in due time the answer came.

Is there no lesson here for us? Most assuredly there is. We, too, may have to wait long in the holy attitude of expectancy, and in the spirit of prayer; but we shall find the time of waiting most profitable for our souls. Very often our God, in His wise and faithful dealing with us, sees fit to withhold the answer, simply to prove us as to the reality of our prayers. The grand point for us is, to have an object laid upon our hearts by the Holy Ghost an object as to which we can lay the finger of faith upon some distinct promise in the word, and to persevere in prayer until we get what we want. ” Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints.” (Eph. vi. 18.)

3 Power of Prayer

All this demands our serious consideration. We are as sadly deficient in perseverance as we are in definiteness and importunity. Hence the feebleness of our prayers and the coldness of our prayer-meetings. We do not come together with a definite object, and hence we are not importunate, and we do not persevere. In short, our prayer-meetings are often nothing but a dull routine a cold, mechanical service something to be gone through - a wearisome alternation of hymn and prayer, hymn and prayer, causing the spirit to groan beneath the heavy burden of mere profitless bodily exercise.

We speak plainly and strongly: we speak as we feel. We must be permitted to speak without reserve. We call upon the whole church of God, far and wide, to look this great question straight in the face to look to God about it to judge themselves about it. Do we not feel the lack of power in our public reunions? Why those barren seasons at the Lord’s table? Why the dulness and feebleness in the celebration of that precious feast which ought to stir the very deepest depths of our renewed being? Why the lack of unction, power, and edification in our public readings the foolish speculations and the silly questions which have been advanced and answered for the last forty years? Why those varied evils on which we have been dwelling, and which are being mourned over almost everywhere by the truly spiritual? Why the barrenness of our gospel services? Why are souls not smitten down under the word? Why is there so little gathering-power?

Brethren, beloved in the Lord, let us rouse ourselves to the solemn consideration of these weighty matters. Let us not be satisfied to go on with the present condition of things. We call upon all those who admit the truth of what we have been putting forth in these pages on ”Prayer and the Prayer-Meeting,” to unite in cordial, earnest, believing prayer and supplication. Let us seek to get together according to God; to come as one man and prostrate ourselves be-

fore the mercy-seat, and perseveringly wait upon our God for the revival of His work, the progress of His gospel, the ingathering and upbuilding of His beloved people. Let our prayer-meetings be really prayermeetings, and not occasions for giving out our favourite hymns, and starting our fancy tunes. The prayer-meeting ought to be the place of expressed need and expected blessing—the place of expressed weakness and expected power—the place where God's people assemble with one accord, to take hold of the very throne of God, to get into the very treasury of heaven, and draw thence all we want for ourselves, for our households, for the whole church of God, and for the vineyard of Christ.

Such is the true idea of a prayer-meeting, if we are to be taught by scripture. May it be more fully realised amongst the Lord's people everywhere. May the Holy Spirit stir us all up and press upon our souls the value, importance, and urgent necessity of unanimity, confidence, definiteness, importunity, and perseverance in all our prayers and prayer meetings.

Yes, there's a power which man can wield,
When mortal aid is vain;
That eye, that arm, that love to reach,
That list'ning ear to gain.
That power is prayer, which soars on high,
Through Jesus, to the throne,
And moves the hand which moves the world
To bring deliverance down.
C. H. M.