

Encouragement for Parents

F. B. Hole.

(Extracted from Scripture Truth Vol. 18, 1926, page 180.)

To be a parent is no light thing in any case. To be a *Christian* parent is an even more serious and responsible thing, as is doubtless realized by those of our readers who stand in such a relationship.

Here are, let us suppose, Christian parents with young children. As they gaze upon their loved little ones they realize that they are parents of their flesh — if we may slightly adopt the phrase used in Hebrews 12: 9 — and that by heredity their children stand possessed of the same fallen nature as they know to be in themselves, and with probably a strong leaning towards just those passions and sins which they know to their sorrow and shame have been particularly emphasized in their own cases. For themselves they have happy experience of the grace of God and of the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit within, as a result they possess the new nature and by the Spirit given to them as believers they know themselves to be in Christ. As yet, however, they could assert no such things of their children, and they are acutely conscious that new birth and faith in Christ are not transmitted from parent to child. Such is the situation: a situation that may well cause deep and serious exercise of heart.

Surprise is not infrequently expressed by onlookers at the spectacle of young people becoming notorious in ungodliness, and yet springing from eminently godly homes; and it is sometimes suggested — in agreement with the arguments and insinuations of Job's three friends — that the explanation must be that there has been grave sin, or at least grave defect in training, on the part of the parents. If, however, what we have just stated be remembered, as also that it is frequently just those who left unconverted would have been the greatest of sinners, that converted become the most devoted of saints, no surprise need be felt. The children have inherited from their parents the Adamic nature with, probably, an emphasis laid on some particular ugly feature or features which, but for the grace of God, would have been to the fore in the case of their parents; and so they will continue until grace intervenes also with them.

But have Christian parents any ground for really expecting such intervention? May they, in the midst of their exercises and even anguish of heart, repose in the confident anticipation of a work of God which in His own time shall effect a great and saving deliverance for their beloved children?

We may answer this important question by referring to the Gospel record and taking note of the seven occasions on which the Lord Jesus was approached by a parent on behalf of a child. They are as follows:

1. The daughter of Jairus: recorded in Matt. 9, Mark 5, and Luke 8. The daughter was a child of twelve, she was therefore just entering upon the age of responsibility; the father, a ruler of the synagogue; the catastrophe impending was the final one of death. In his affliction Jairus found his resource in an appeal to the Lord. He was heard, yet the impending catastrophe was not averted as doubtless he expected with more or less faith. Circumstances conspired to hinder, and the Lord did not alter the circumstances. Yet Jairus' appeal did not fall on unheeding ears. It was answered with a fulness of power that went beyond the father's faith, and the maid was restored to life.

2. The daughter of the woman of Canaan: recorded in Matt. 15 and Mark 7. The parent here was a Gentile, springing from an accursed race. The Lord Himself was in the coasts of Tyre and Sidon, a very stronghold of the devil, as Ezekiel 28: 11-19 testifies, and her daughter was grievously vexed with a demon. The poor woman, though an outcast, a mere dog, brought the case of her child to Jesus. She

was not heard at once. The Lord used the occasion of the intensity of her affliction to work a wholesome state of honesty and humility and confession in her soul. But, when she took her own true place and incidentally expressed her faith in the largeness of His bounty that would overflow to a Gentile dog such as she was, she got to the full the desire of her heart in her daughter's deliverance. Her appeal was effectual. She was heard.

3. The lunatic, son of a certain man: recorded in Matt. 17, Mark 9 and Luke 9. This case has several features of special interest. In the absence of the Lord upon the mount of transfiguration, the man first brought the lad to the remaining nine disciples, and they failed to cast out the demon. The failure of the disciples cast reflections on the power of the Master, and hence, knowing all too well the peculiar malignity and stubbornness of the demon who held his boy in bondage, the father approached the Lord with weak and shaken faith, saying, "If Thou *canst* do *anything*, have compassion on us, and help us." This gave the Lord the opportunity of demonstrating two things. First, His own supreme power, utterly beyond the possibility of challenge by the adversary. The demon did his malign worst, as though he would wreck the poor tenement of clay, if, indeed, he had to vacate it; yet the Lord raised up the lad and delivered him to his father in perfect soundness. Second, that the only "if" that could by any possibility be introduced into the case, concerned the faith of the parent, who made the application, addressed to His grace and power: "If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth." That great statement full of encouragement was made in reference to a parent's application to Jesus for the deliverance and blessing of his child.

4. The little children brought that He should put His hands on them and pray: recorded in Matt. 19, Mark 10 and Luke 18. This case also is of *peculiar* interest. The children in question were very young. "Little children," "young children," "infants" are the descriptions given. We are not told with any exactness who brought them. In each Gospel the matter is left impersonal. Presumably the parents brought them; if brought by others, it only makes the Lord's reception of them the more remarkable. The disciples, moreover, were actively hostile to the request, yet "He took them up in His arms, put His hands upon them and blessed them."

5. The mother of Zebedee's children with her sons: recorded in Matt. 20. In this case the "children" were no longer young, but full-grown men. No: were they strangers to the Lord Jesus but His acknowledged disciples, His chosen apostles, and near the end of their period of instruction by the Lord in person. The request preferred by their mother did not concern their deliverance or blessing either physical or spiritual, but had to do with their advancement and honour in the coming kingdom of displayed glory. A mother's natural pride and pleasure in her son sought its gratification at His hands *and was refused!*

6. The son of the widow of Nain: recorded in Luke 7. Special features are again prominent here. The dead son was a full-grown man and the only son of his mother, and she a widow. There is no record that the poor woman, widowed and weeping, uttered any appeal as the two crowds met — a dead man the centre of one; the Christ, the Prince of Life, the centre of the other. Yet, though no cry for help passed her lips, though she was perhaps all-unconscious of the true identity of the Living One, He saw her; He had compassion on her; He said to her, "Weep not." He "touched the bier: and they that bare him stood still, and He said, Young man, I say unto thee, Arise. And he that was dead sat up, and began to speak. And He delivered him to his mother."

Touched in His infinite compassion by the sight of a mother's lamentations, superadded to a widow's grief, unasked He acted; and the power that was always the servant of His compassion wrought a deliverance which she never expected, and dried up her tears.

7. A certain nobleman, whose son was sick at Capernaum: recorded in John 4. Here again we meet with the pleadings of faith. The father went personally to Jesus and besought Him to come and heal his son. True faith had to be tested. The unbelieving mass were content with nothing but signs and wonders, and faith which merely rests on visible displays is no true faith at all. Under the test the nobleman redoubled his pleading and was then met by the word, "Go thy way; thy son liveth." Here his faith triumphed, for without the slightest display which appealed to sight the man took the Lord at His word and went home, only to be met on the way by his servants with the joyful tidings of his son's recovery; a recovery that took place with miraculous suddenness at the very hour in which Jesus uttered the word of power concerning him. No wonder that then he believed and his whole house! The thing of note was that he believed before, for faith is taking Him at His word — believing what He says, *because He says it.*

We have briefly reviewed these seven Gospel instances that we may obtain a safe and sound — because Scriptural — answer to our question. The question was, be it remembered. Have Christian parents any ground for expecting God to intervene in the blessing of their children?

The joyful answer is: Yes, they have most abundant ground for expecting it. Is their child an infant? The Lord Jesus took infants into His arms and blessed them. Is it the case of a daughter or son afflicted by the power of the devil, or near to death, or actually in death, or even a son grown to man's estate and claimed by death as its prey and insensible to all beside? In each case He heard and wrought deliverance. True, in one case there was delay, circumstances were permitted to hinder. In another there had to be first wrought a work of honest self-judgment in the soul of the afflicted Gentile mother; in another the gentle rebuke of feeble and shaken faith in the anguished father; in yet another the testing of very genuine faith that it might the more distinctly be manifested; and all these spiritual dealings with the parents necessitated some delay. Yet in every case their cry was heard and abundantly answered.

Still there was one exception, which was the more remarkable inasmuch as the applicants here were definite followers and servants of the Lord *before making their application.* They were, indeed, the only ones of the seven of which we could confidently affirm this, and they were the only ones that met with a refusal! Ah, but they came not for blessing and healing and deliverance, but for honour and preferment! Herein lay the secret of their disappointment, and therefore the one exception is the exception which proves the rule.

We, who are Christian parents, may then with confidence get upon our knees to bring the cases of our children to the Lord. If we bring them with a desire for their prominence and glory, in order that our natural pride and pleasure in them may be enhanced by their being distinguished either in this world or the world to come, we have no ground for expecting the Lord to act. If we bring them that their desperate need may be met and their blessing accomplished, He will hear us. The varying circumstances on our side will be no hindrance. We ourselves may be Jews or Gentiles, people of little faith or defective faith, or strong faith, or even so overpowered by grief that we make no audible appeal at all — it is all the same. The children may be young or old, afflicted in mind or body, or with no affliction at all — it is all the same. He will deliver. He will bless. He will do it in His own time, so as to spiritually exercise and bless the parent as well as the child, which may mean delay; but He will do it, and do it tenderly, even taking them up in the arms of His love to bless them.

No longer is He upon earth, so that the anguished parent heart may cry out before Him, "Master, I beseech Thee, look upon my son" — or "daughter" as the case may be. He is exalted in the heavens with all power at His disposal. Yet He is unchanged in His compassions as in all else, "Jesus Christ the

same yesterday, and today, and for ever." Therefore your cry shall be answered by the unchanged and unchanging Christ in the same unchanging way.

Is not this enough?