

Prayer: an Index to the Soul

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Part 1

God the Eternal stoops to hear prayer and connects the glory of His Throne with man on earth.

How sweet to the soul is the privilege of communing with God. His greatness on the one hand and our feebleness on the other, shows such a distance between that the possibility of drawing near and breathing out our little sorrows and perplexities seems an impossibility. In spite of this He has so ordered things that we can come before Himself and, with all the mystery which produces awe there is, nevertheless, a holy simplicity which fills the heart with unspeakable delight. If the knowledge of His creatorial power with all its works of grandeur in evidence everywhere, would augment the difficulty and put us further from Himself, there is the revelation of His heart in the counsels of His love which silences every fear and draws us after Himself in ever increasing intimacy and holy joy. Though so far beyond the feeble creature that He has placed upon the earth and which is itself but a speck in the immensity of creation, yet He stoops to interest Himself in our joys and sorrows, pains and pleasures, hopes and fears, in such a way as to gain the confidence of our hearts for Himself and when we see that He has been pleased to link His glory, the honour of His Name, and the integrity of His throne with such creatures as we are before the eyes of the higher ranks of creation, we can but bow in adoring worship and deep delight.

The complex character of man's being in regard to prayer.

While on our side prayer is a clear expression of dependence it also speaks of the unique place we fill in the scale of being. In the complex character of His being man has links both with spirit creation above and the animal class beneath. Bound by his body to the earth of which it forms part he has links with the creature beneath but taking a place in the spirit creation he not only has links with these but is fitted to hold converse with God the great Author of life to whom he owes his existence. Then when we recall that the before time purposes of God specially concern the race of mankind though almighty power would repel, holy love attracts and we are encouraged to draw near and lay bare in His presence the inmost secrets of our heart. Both the natural and spiritual sides of our being should be kept in view when speaking of prayer. There are the bodily needs which must be met or death will terminate the earthly course while on the spiritual side the heart must have an object. All the great structure of life around us, where field and forest, city, town, and village appear, is traceable to the fact that man needs food for his body. But as a moral being cannot exist without an object, much of the same structure witnesses to the requirements of his soul. From the earliest ages man has sought to gratify his thirst for knowledge by investigating the various departments of creation to which he has access. Success here may in his present state exalt man but never satisfy him. Consequently he is compelled to look beyond what is material to Him who is over all, and in Whom he lives, moves, and has his being.

The unconverted may pray to God and be answered.

Having departed from his created estate, it is impossible apart from a work of grace in the soul for man to approach God intelligently. Prayer is therefore properly the resource of those in relationship with God. In spite, however, of his state of alienation man is often found seeking God in prayer. This, all would admit springs from his resourcelessness and an innate sense of the supremacy of God. This is

clearly seen in Cain, who after slaying his brother, actually held converse with God, who offered him an outlet from the consequences of his guilt. Natural conscience may own God though morally far from Him and the man of the world, while rejecting the Gospel, may often seek God in prayer regarding things of this life while content to remain outside the pale of blessing and be lost for eternity. The man of faith is rebuked by the worldling (Gen. 12) who owned the hand of God in the matter. The Patriarch falling into the same evil again is reproved by Abimelech to whom God manifested Himself in the matter. Balaam, at a later date, sought permission from God to curse Israel, and though actuated by the basest of motives, had considerable converse with Him. Others will own God though outside the blessing, through those that are in relationship with Him, seeking in that way His help on their behalf. The Pharaoh of the Exodus sought divine aid through Moses, Nebuchadnezzar through Daniel, and Simon the sorcerer through Peter. Such is the heart of man that even a sorcerer may act thus for in some way or another though far from God and hating His people there is a sense that the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much. (James 5: 16.).

Prayer is properly the privilege of faith and is guided by revelation.

Though man in his fallen state may come to God and seek His help while ignoring the Gospel, prayer is properly a feature of the family of faith and should be marked by intelligence "Behold he prayeth," are the words used by the Lord to distinguish one just brought to own Himself. Then again it would be governed by the way God is pleased to make Himself known. The communion of the antediluvian saints would be very different from that of saints to-day. Revelation being progressive till its completion in the death and resurrection of Christ the theme of interest was of necessity constantly changing as fresh light was given by God. It would be as far beyond the ability of Enoch or Noah to converse with God about the land of His purpose and the temple as it would have been for Moses or David to pray to God in the name of the Lord Jesus. None of the Old Testament saints could pray for the Father's Kingdom as the disciples were taught in Matt. 6; nor would these disciples at that time however favoured be able to pray like Paul in Eph. 3 that the Christ might dwell by faith in the heart.

Intimacy and divine communications.

Such changes in the ways of God were a necessity when fuller communications were made known; but whatever the testimony may be, communion with God must bring supreme happiness at any moment. In the nature of things it must take the saint from the man and his world to God and the scene of His purpose. Both Enoch and Noah are said to have walked with God, an immense thing surely in those apostate days. It involved for each an holy intimacy in which special communications of the mind of God were given which reached down through the ages right on to the day of glory yet to come. To Enoch was given the revelation of the second advent of Christ in glory, and to Noah the disclosure of impending judgment with the promise of being carried through the flood and becoming the head of a new world which had been purged by judgment.

A chain of honoured witnesses to prayer.

In the development of the divine ways Abraham comes next. He stands as a landmark at the beginning of a new departure in the testimony and such is the intimacy that he was called into that he is named the friend of God. Isaac, Jacob and Joseph each in their generation followed; men whose histories exhibit not only the ordinary exercise of supplication on the principle of faith but also divine communications both by visions and dreams. These three are, so to speak, the links of connection

between Abraham and Moses the mediator, of whom it is said "The Lord spake unto Moses face to face as a man speaketh unto his friend." He is a witness of how a man may be drawn beyond the day and dispensation in which he lives in such a way that the glory of God shone in his face, and in holy confidence he could say "Show me Thy glory." The book of Job, belonging to these same days, indicates the apprehension of a good man and his friends which God had given to men at that time. Living in the full light of revelation we can see "the end of the Lord" as the blessed solution of all the Patriarch's distress. The three friends said many true things but they failed by limiting God. Elihu shows advance beyond Job himself and by his words prepares him for the manifestation of Him whose intervention brought all to an issue.

Unity and yet diversity both in prayer and praise.

The volume of prayer and praise ever ascending in the ages between Moses and Christ was very great. It is exceedingly instructive as showing the variety of wants and woes, joys and sorrows, experienced by the saints and the ever gracious care of God. Unity in diversity is seen in the way that both prayers and praises take their character from the circumstances in which they were uttered, and the way in which God was revealed at the moment. Joshua's prayers differed from those of Moses as having reached the land of promise, the fear of God and the sense of resource characterising each. Ezra and Nehemiah of necessity differ greatly from both David and Solomon as both Isaiah and Amos would from Zechariah and Malachi, though all appeal to the covenant God, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

Certain outstanding persons and the character of their prayers.

The prayers of Hanna mark another important epoch in the ways of God. Her afflicted soul yearned after that which would meet not her own need only, but also that of the people of God. Samuel-asked of God-was given in answer to her beseechings, one who was markedly a man of prayer. He was raised up and became the link between God and the people, until the arrival of the king, the man after God's own heart. With David we reach that which in a sense is permanent because of His greater Son. Whatever may be the failure after that recovery must be connected with his house because David's Son is David's Lord. Like Joseph he had to go through a course of training, in view of the place he was destined to fill. Much that was beyond explanation in the early life of these two honoured servants lay in the fact that they were chosen to typify the rejection of Christ. In men like Elijah and Elisha, Ezekiel and Daniel, we can see the variety of exercise, trial and sorrow common to God's servants in relation to His testimony but to none was it given to exhibit so full a measure of the varied tossings, struggles, and commotions of the human heart as is seen in David. To his Psalms we turn for the inspired record of the capabilities of the human heart both in its storms and calms and with it adoringly learn something of the soul-searching process which a faithful God puts His people through. Linking for a moment the two great names of Job and Jeremiah with that of David we may learn something of the marvellous ways of our God. All three represent deep Sorrow and poignant suffering and while David gives us so much the other two got so low down as to curse the day of their birth.

Prayer is the instinctive cry of the heart in the battle of life.

But it is possible to go through Scripture pointing out a long list of devoted servants and their communings with God and know little about it ourselves. A man of science may give a good lecture about a loaf, telling all about its constituent elements, but a hungry person though ignorant will eat it.

Prayer is the instinctive yearning of the human heart after God and is better understood than taught. It may be well, therefore, before touching the New Testament to look a moment at the inner psychology of prayer. This will give an insight to the variety of feelings, motives and exercises, which are so characteristic of those who are brought into the school of God. How much do we know of that soul-distress which is needed for a sinner to pass into the sense of peace with God. Men like Martin Luther and John Bunyan and many others passed through such agonies as almost to unhinge the mind. In my distress I cried unto the Lord and He heard me (Ps. 120: 1). What was his cry "Remember not the sins of my youth, nor my transgressions; according to Thy mercy remember Thou me for Thy goodness' sake, O Lord . . . For Thy name's sake, O Lord, pardon mine iniquity for it is great." (Ps. 25: 7 and 11). But deliverance comes and the soul can triumphantly say "Thou art my hiding place; Thou shalt preserve me from trouble: Thou shalt compass me about with songs of deliverance. Selah (Ps. 32: 7).

It is an outlet in distress and shows the capabilities of the soul.

It is just here that the disciplinary dealings of God with the soul begins. "For whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth." "He is the preserver of all men *but especially those that believe,*" but if so the bearing of His government towards the righteous must be different from its action upon men of the world. We must remember also that the saints of earlier days were not so favourably situated as we are today. Christ having come, redemption is accomplished, and hence we are in the reign of grace. They were in the reign of death and were all their lifetime subject to bondage. (Rom. 5: 21. Heb. 2: 14, 15). The blessed God doubtless met **them in their needs** but they had not, as we have, a sympathising high Priest in heaven. Weighing Job's case in the light of this we see the magnitude of his suffering and the enigma of his case that neither he nor his friends could meet. This man, along with David and Hezekiah, shows the saint in bodily affliction. "Wherefore hidest Thou Thy face, and holdest me for Thine enemy? Wilt Thou break a leaf driven to and fro? and wilt Thou pursue the dry stubble?" (Job 13: 24, 25). "O Lord, rebuke me not in Thine anger, neither chasten me in Thy hot displeasure." (David, Ps. 6: 1). See for Hezekiah Isa. 38. What good would a prayer book or a written form of prayer have been to men in such circumstances? The distresses of the heart none can anticipate. All that is artificial but adds to the sorrow, and the soul cries out in its own language of agony to its God.

Prayer looks past all secondary causes to God.

There is also the hatred of the world for it has become the training ground of those who are made heirs of glory. Joseph was shut up in prison because he would not defile himself. "Hear the right, O Lord, attend unto my cry" might well have been his plaint. David was hunted by Saul because of his integrity. "Be merciful unto me, O God, for man would swallow me up; he fighting daily oppresseth me." Jeremiah is shut up in prison for speaking the word of the Lord. (See his wail in Jer. 20: 7-21.). In all this we are made to see that life is not a playground but a schoolroom, not a holiday but a training. We have to face realities if we are to be here for God. In these things as in all else our blessed Lord is the great Example.

By it the soul is led above all circumstances to praise God.

Through such trying circumstances the Lord leads His people that He may have the full confidence of their heart. Joy and not sorrow is His thought for us but He has to put us through sorrow on the way to it. "Weeping may endure for a night but joy cometh in the morning." Even now He so

works that we may taste the blessedness of holy joy in Himself. "Thou hast put gladness in my heart more than in the time that their corn and their wine increased." (Ps. 4: 7). As an illustration of this there is nothing better than Habakkuk. He began wailing and finished exulting. "Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, **and the fields shall yield no meat.** The flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls: Yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation." (Hab. 1: 2-4; Hab. 3: 17, 18).

Part 2.

The progress of revelation alters the character of prayer.

Coming to the New Testament we are on very different ground. The full revelation of God in the Son incarnate necessarily places the righteous in a position greatly in advance of anything known before. Communion with God being of a richer character, prayer and praise is made to correspond. As associated with Messiah on the earth the disciples were taught that God was their Father and all the gracious interest which that relationship presumes was to be known by them. He had numbered the hairs of their heads, and would have them to know that they were themselves of more value than many sparrows, that His delight was to meet them in all their needs and His good pleasure to give them the Kingdom. Such an advance in blessing involves a change in moral obligation hence instead of calling down fire from heaven or entreating for judgment on their enemies they were to love them and bless those that would curse them, do good to them that hate them and pray for them that despitefully use and persecute them. By so doing they would show themselves to be the sons of their Father in heaven. This was the necessary result of the presence of Christ here and it continued until He took His place on high when further light and blessing was made known. By redemption Christ took up a new place in heaven and sent down the Holy Ghost in whose power His servants went forth as the heralds of heaven's bounty to men.

The advance in the character of prayer both in Paul and John as distinguished from the Three Synoptic Gospels.

Prayer is thus lifted to a much higher plane. But we must mark a distinction even here, for the teaching about prayer in John's Gospel is far beyond that of the other three. The synoptic Gospels connect prayer with life here and its circumstances and their needs, but in John, prayer is about the interests of the Father and the Son. The disciples are viewed in John not merely associated with a suffering Messiah on earth but as having part with Him glorified; and having the new testimony of heavenly things committed to their trust their prayers were to take character from that. They were to ask in His name and they would receive. If they would abide in Him and His word abide in them they would ask what they wished and it would be done that the Father might be glorified in the Son. We have to remember that John's writings come last and therefore Paul's ministry comes between him and the other three Gospels. The Gospel of the glory given to Paul and the truth of the mystery, wonderfully amplify what began to come out by the Lord. These great truths create for faith an entirely new situation, setting in a new light the dealings of God, not only with the earth and mankind, but with the whole creation and enlarging in the apprehension of the believer the glory of Christ as the Object of the counsels of eternity. In the light of this the prayers of the prison Epistles should be read particularly that to the Ephesians; for there the Church is seen with Christ at the centre of a redeemed creation, things which produce in the Apostle the richest and grandest strains of prayer and praise. After all this

John is used to tell us about prayer in relation to the Father and the Son and the circle of love in the light of eternal counsels.

In all this let it be remembered that the Son is addressed in Manhood as Lord and both prayer and praise directed to Him. In the days of His flesh the wise men of the east, the woman of Tyre, and the man who received his sight worshipped Him. The decree had gone forth "Let all the angels of God worship Him." In spite of this it is a sad fact that many who own His Lordship, and one has no reason to doubt that they are His by faith, refuse to make Him the Object of their richest notes of praise. If they that have been rescued from eternal woe by Him refuse to adore Him now it is a comfort to think that such will join the song of praise which has Him for its Object in the scene above in the coming time of His glory. Stephen invoked Him saying "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit," Paul fell before Him saying " Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" Ananias obeyed His voice concerning the penitent Saul. Peter communed with Him at the introduction of the Gentile into blessing. Paul is seen several times in the Acts in communion with His Lord, and in company with John delights to render to the Son the honours due to deity. "Unto Him that loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood and hath made us kings and priests unto God and His Father to Him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen. (Rev. 1: 6).

Secret prayer, soul agony and soul testing.

We rightly distinguish between public and private prayer. The latter indeed qualifies for the former. If power and freshness is to be maintained in public service there must be dealings with God in the closet. It is in this way that true piety is formed and combined with a sense of dependence which is the proper qualification for true service. Weakness and want of resource with us, eternal love and power with Him. He delights in having our confidence, and makes us to know that all His resources are at our disposal if we are willing to give Him His proper place and keep ours. He cannot be deceived since all things are naked and open to His eyes, neither can He be informed though He delights to hear His children telling out their needs. There is much that passes between the soul and God in secrete that is too sacred for human ears. Who can conceive the depth of feeling and agony in the struggles with God in the secret chamber. We have all a secret history with God and He has wisely shut this out from all else. It is well said that the best part of human history is never written. There are, moments in the history of God's testimony in this world when everything is made as it were to rest on the shoulders of one man. Paul stood alone when even Peter and Barnabas gave way. Athanasius and Augustine had both to stand alone in their day for all that is fundamental. Luther was made to stand alone in the face of all Christendom. The prayer of this servant is preserved for us that he poured out to God in deepest agony the night before the decision in his trial at Worms. Anyone may read it in the history of the Reformation by D'Aubigné or Miller's Church history.

Examples of secret prayer and intercession for our encouragement.

For our encouragement our God has recorded in His word many instances of the secret prayers of His saints whether in regard to their own affairs or in behalf of others. Jacob wrestled with God till the breaking of the day and obtained the blessing. Jabez, whose name means sorrow, "called upon the God of Israel, saying, "Oh that Thou wouldest bless me indeed and enlarge my coast, and that Thou mightest be with me, and that Thou wouldest keep me from evil, that it may not grieve me!" and God granted him that which he requested" Both Abraham and Moses pleaded with God on behalf of others and their prayers were honoured by Him. Hezekiah and Daniel at a later date are notable examples of

intercessory prayer in the secret of God's presence. The former went into the House of God alone and spread out the threatening letter of the King of Assyria before Him resulting in an immediate answer which brought about the destruction of the whole Assyrian army in one night. With Daniel it was different. The blessed God leads us up as it were to the chamber of this holy man and permits us to hear the breathings of his soul, in his fasting, prayer and confession.

Though in a strange land he poured out his heart in behalf of his people and was signally honoured by the revelation to his soul of the great prophecy of the seventy weeks, which supplies the key to the dispensational dealings of God with the earth from that time to the day of glory yet to come. There is nothing more pleasing to God than to have us before Himself with nothing kept back and no reserve whether in regard to our own affairs or what concerns the interest in His testimony in the earth.

It shows a capability for interest in the whole scope of God's dealings with the race.

The practice of secret prayer is not acquired suddenly but is the result of a course wherein we are made to learn our own nothingness and the loving kindness of our good and gracious God. Let none think that it is limited to the advanced saint. There is room in the practice of it for advance, but from the moment the soul is converted, real intercourse with God begins which shows that a change has been wrought. Its continuance gradually puts a new moral colour on the whole life. It is not insipid and lifeless as merely asking what we want: it is real, living and energetic as a result of having an intelligent hold; upon God. From one's self and home circle it reaches out to the whole scope of the interests of Christ. Then to the sphere of the divine government on the earth, taking in kings and all that are in authority, and going out to the utmost bounds of the earth for the blessing of men. This is seen in many scriptures (1 Thess. 5: 17, 18. Phil. 4: 6, 7; and Heb. 4: 16.) and as it becomes the habit of the soul a new character is formed-the character of Christ really-which results in the person's ability for moral influence by the body being full of light. To Samuel the Israelites turned, saying, "Cease not to cry unto the Lord our God for us," and a little later in the book it is said "All the people greatly feared the Lord and Samuel." (1 Sam. 7: 8, 1 Sam. 12: 18.).

It leads to spiritual maturity and puts a new moral colour on the whole life.

The continuation of closet work encourages self-judgment, a healthy exercise, which leads to self knowledge and growth in the knowledge of God and all that is not in accord with holiness is detected and avoided. Then these secret communings with God will lead to a desire for The Scriptures, by which He speaks to us, and the Bible will be increasingly treasured. If God therein speaks to us His voice will call forth the joy of the new relationship in which His grace has set us and holy affections will be awakened which will flow out to Himself in worship, praise and adoration. Thus God becomes better known and the soul seeks increasingly the solitude of His presence where fresh communications of heavenly and eternal verities are tasted. Along with this a holy watchfulness takes possession of the person so that nothing may be permitted which would cause reserve or disturb the holy tranquillity that is enjoyed.

The place of fasting in connection with prayer.

Fasting may be mentioned here in connection with devotional exercises as that which refers to the needs of the body. It is the result of the person being sustained in the presence of God in such holy

intimacy as to forget for the moment the bodily needs and even when they make their rightful appeal they are for the moment quietly postponed. Stated times for this are most precious where there is energy for it. Holy watchfulness is needed however, for it is well-known that the enemy has wrought great havoc here by leading many into practices hurtful to spiritual well-being and also to bodily health. It is better apart from prearrangement though none dare to lay down rules. Which ever way it may be done let us be careful to follow Scripture lest Satan get an advantage over us in that which is most holy.

Sad lack of closet work seen in our public prayer.

It is clear that many things may be said in the closet that should not be repeated in public. Alone with God the soul may act in a way it could not do before others for there may be groanings which cannot be uttered. "For whether we be besides ourselves it is to God: or whether we be sober, it is for your cause." What is said would be in connection with the occasion whether come together to speak to saints or sinners, or it may be at the bedside of the sick or with the bereaved. How sad that a person while bending at a sick bed should ramble from one thing to another for a considerable time till the sufferer is on the point of crying out in distress. It should not be rambling but simple and direct and avoiding tautology. Repeating lines from hymns and even passages of Scripture may encourage a tendency to sanctimonious affectation which is hurtful to others and displeasing to God. We hesitate to speak on this point but assuredly something is called for. When those who are both estimable and helpful never lead in prayer without dragging on about many things which have no bearing on the immediate occasion of our being together we are compelled to conclude that there is at least a lack of self-knowledge. If we add to this the constant repetition of the names of divine Persons in prayer it surely will be admitted that there is a need for drawing attention to such things. "Is it a small matter for you to weary men, but will you weary my God also?" If there was sufficient self-possession to stop with what the Spirit would give at the moment we would stop at the top note and have the satisfaction of helping according to our measure. While pointing out this for the consideration of our brethren we have no thought of faultfinding. Rather would we encourage all to freshness and power that they may be helpers in God's House as coming forth from the closet. It is just possible with our best directed efforts to become a hindrance to others. We may endeavour to help the meetings with a view to encourage others to come and by our very efforts keep them back.

Public prayers honoured and recorded for our encouragement.

The public prayers of Scripture are a delightful study. Three men stood up on different occasions, viz.: Moses, Samuel and Elijah, and were honoured of God in relation to His people. When Amalek attacked the people in the wilderness Moses stood with uplifted hands in intercession till the enemy was routed. At a time of defeat Samuel gathered all Israel to Mizpah and cried unto the Lord and was heard. The Lord thundered that day and discomfited the Philistines and they were smitten before Israel. (Ex. 17: 8-14, 1 Sam. 7: 5-12.) In the time of Israel's apostasy under Ahab, Elijah built an altar and called upon Jehovah before the prophets of Baal. By a divine intervention he was answered and great was the destruction of the apostates that day. God is the rewarder of them that diligently seek Him out and He has said, "They that honour Me I will honour." (1 Kings 18: 30-39, Heb. 11: 4, 1 Sam. 2: 30.) Then note the prayer of Solomon at the dedication of the temple and the supplication of Jehoshaphat in an hour of need on the lines of what Solomon had said. (2 Chr. 6: 12-42, 2 Chr. 19: 5-12) and the gathering for prayer-praise and confession in Neh. 9. Lastly may we with reverence bring in our Lord's intercessory prayer in John 17 as that which He uttered in the hearing of His disciples but as something which forever must stand alone.

Our Lord Jesus Christ a Man of prayer. This is a holy mystery.

We are compelled in dealing with prayer to say a few words on the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ as having taken a path of dependence and exercising the holy function of prayer. This is something that calls for separate treatment and upon which our words in a meditation like this must be few. That He spent much time in prayer during His sojourn upon the earth while still remaining God over all is a mystery beyond all creature ken. None ever prayed as He did. "Hold up My goings that My footsteps slip not." "By the words of Thy lips I have kept Me from the paths of the destroyer." May we not learn with reverence what was the subject of much of His prayer. If we were more in the knowledge of His word doubtless these very prayers would yield much for our blessing. He was in converse with His Father before calling the twelve, before feeding the five thousand and before He raised Lazarus from the dead besides the memorable occasions of His Baptism, transfiguration, the sorrows of Gethsemane and the deep dark hours of Calvary. Did the relationship in which He stood lessen the sorrow and anguish which His sufferings entailed or detract from the fervency of His prayers? Let the scene in Gethsemane supply the answer. Is it not clear that in His coming into Manhood in the very nature of things one of two things must happen? He must either sweep the scene in judgment or be a Man of sorrows. In the light of the purpose of God the latter must be His portion and in that chosen position He lived a life of prayer and dependence for the glory of God. "Is it nothing to all ye that pass by? Behold and see if there be any sorrow like My sorrow." (Lam. 1: 12.)

He spoke to His Father as friend with friend.

It is necessary, however, to point out that He never took common ground with others in prayer. The glory of His Person forbids such a thought. Not once did He use the word in addressing God which is proper for a creature when supplicating his God. He spoke as friend with friend using a word that none other dared use. In this, as in all else, we see in Scripture the care the Holy Ghost has taken to guard His glory and the adoring heart says Who would not have it so. On the one hand we behold One to whom both prayer and praise is addressed, who hears and answers according to His immutable power and wisdom, while on the other we see Him in man's estate for the glory of God and there He is the Man of prayer seeking in dependence to carry out the whole will of God.

Prayer and the government of God.

There is in many minds a difficulty about prayer because of the orderly way that all things are made to work in the economy of nature and the apparent reign of law. Since this bears directly upon the character of God we must look at it for a moment. The way God rules creation for the common good while dealing with a special class calls for reverent inquiry since it links with both His providence and government on the one hand, and His holy nature and the counsels of grace on the other.

Creation controlled in view of the earth and mankind.

Whatever may be the extent of creation we may reasonably conclude that the earth is the centre of interest as being the home of man. The place of that being in God's counsels proves this and accounts for the way that things are ruled not to speak of the grand fundamental facts of Incarnation and Atonement. Certain it is that the earth does not travel in her orbit as an isolated unit, unaffected by those other bodies which fill the heavens in a visible way. In the providence of God all this has in view the need of our bodies and the whole animal creation as well "for He openeth His hand and satisfieth

the desire of every living thing." Sunshine and rain, storm and tempest, the lightning's flash and thunder's peal, all speak of divine power put forth beneficially in view of life upon the earth. These things along with others such as pestilence, famine and earthquakes may also be used in His holy government for keeping evil in check and the maintenance of moral order in a fallen race. All is wisely ordered in view of forming the character and shaping the conduct of man and qualifying him to learn the wisdom, power and glory of his God. In this way the material is governed by the moral throughout creation and God's power is seen as servant of His love. He maketh His sun to shine on the just and unjust, He may make it stand still or even hide it in darkness. The moon, too, is stayed in her journey and the stars made to fight in their courses, the wind becomes His messenger, the rain fulfils His command, and the earth itself is made to tremble. All this and much more may be seen as creation's testimony to its God.

Prayer shows creation ruled in relation not merely to men but for the training of the righteous.

But the witness is refused. The enemy has succeeded in blinding men to the beneficent goodness of God, and much worse, for in the name of science some have attempted to shut God out of His creation altogether. In spite of this, the good work goes on for the good of even the impious, but, at the same time, another class comes into view to whom the grand lessons of creation, providence and government become educative in view of still richer blessing in the redemption sphere. The believing heart while adoring God, recognises that the only law that governs creation in all its departments is the ever present will of the Creator, and that the whole machinery of creation is at work not only in relation to man in the aggregate but also with a view to the well-being, discipline and training of the righteous. It is at this point we pass from the outer departments of creation, providence and government into the inner circle of redemption to learn the love of God and His counsels of grace in Christ Jesus our adorable Lord. "He is the preserver of all men, but especially of those that believe," and in this way we are made to see the conjunction of the general with the particular in the combined display of His hand and His heart. While controlling the whole framework of creation for the good of all, at the same time it is made to work in view of a coming eternity for the growth and blessing of the family of faith. "But we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose." The knowledge that all the mighty forces of nature are linked in the providence of God with the affairs of men is a marvellous thing, but we can go further and see the whole grand scheme at work with wheels working within wheels with accurate precision, controlled by eternal love and omnipotent power for the good of suffering saints. "He that planted the ear, shall He not hear? He that formed the eye shall He not see?" (Ps. 94: 9. See also Jer. 23: 23, 24.)

Convulsions in the realm of nature may be in answer to the cry of faith.

But such things are connected with faith and state of soul. It is unthinkable that God should intervene in the same way on behalf of those not walking in subjection to Himself. Israel may carry the ark of God round Jericho for seven days at the end of which God overturns the City walls, but if they think the mere presence of that vessel will save them from the Philistines when they themselves are in disobedience woe be to them. It is the prayer of faith that moves the hand of Him that rules creation. In this way the natural is made to serve the spiritual, the material the moral, and the very things which hide our Creator from our gaze are made the medium of His display. It was in answer to His people's need and the cry of Moses that a path was made through the sea. God, having no controversy with

material things makes them serve His end for moral reasons. "Was the Lord displeased against the rivers, was Thine anger against the rivers? Was Thy wrath against the sea that Thou didst ride upon Thy horses and Thy chariots of salvation." (Hab. 3: 8.). Nor yet does He find fault with the mountains though He may make them to tremble or overturn them by the roots. If He turn a river into blood or stay another in full spate so that it flow back it is an intervention on behalf of His people. Such things were done in answer to prayer and brought blessing for His own people but judgment upon His enemies. That such events were outside the ordinary course of things is proved, by the fact that the Egyptians who daringly ventured to follow the Israelites through the sea were destroyed. Prayer brought bread from heaven and water out of the rock; by it Amalek and his host were defeated in the wilderness and in answer to Samuel the Lord thundered with a great thunder upon the Philistines when they were discomfited at Mizpah. Elijah prayed and rain was withheld and again he prayed and it was given. In answer to the prayer of Hezekiah a great army was destroyed in one night. And thus we see God proving His interest in His people in the display of His power in answer to their prayers.

"He everywhere hath sway, and all things serve His might;

His every act pure blessing is, His path unsullied light.

When He makes bare His arm, who shall His work withstand?

When He His people's cause defend, who then shall stay His hand?"

He controls men's minds in regard to prayer. The whole fabric of human life under His control.

But there is more than this. The knowledge of God's power everywhere at work on our behalf is intended to beget confidence in our hearts towards Himself. But the whole moral world is under His control as well. The hearts of all men, the whole realm of human thought and action, public opinion in all its phases, and at all times with all the characters great and small which figure therein; all are ruled or over-ruled by Him. Consequently He orders the rise and fall of nations, the course of their histories and extent of their territories, so that the development of human history is as conclusive in proof of God's providential and moral government as the heavens are of His power and glory. "The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord as the rivers of water: He turneth it whithersoever He will." (Prov. 21: 1.) "The Lord maketh poor and maketh rich, He bringeth low and lifteth up." (1 Sam. 2: 6.) "For promotion cometh neither from the east nor the west nor from the south but God is the judge: He putteth down one and setteth up another." (Ps. 75: 6-7.) These things are established beyond all doubt, being set before us in the Holy Word both through the inspired writings of the Old Testament Seer and the New Testament Apostle. (Dan. 2: 20-23.) (Acts 17: 24-26.)

In many ways God seeks our confidence and our company.

In many ways our God is seeking the confidence of His people but we ill requite His love. Is it not often the case that we refuse to turn to Him till every plan we can devise has been tried and every human avenue shut? May not much of the suffering we pass through be on account of our reluctance to trust Him. He has to stir up our nest so that instead of feathers there is thorns till the soul often has to cry out in distress. "Prove me now herewith saith the Lord of Hosts, if I will not open the windows of heaven and pour you out a blessing that there shall not be room enough to receive." Love must have company and in numberless ways He attracts us into His presence that we may feel ourselves at home while He unfolds to us His plans counting on our interest in what is before Him. Things which "Eye

hath not seen nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him."

Like the rising vapour, prayer is constantly going up to God.

The recorded prayers of Scripture are but a sample of what is constantly going up, and who can tell its bearing upon the world of human life. Just as in nature where the rain that comes down is the result of that process of evaporation by which the immense volume of water ascends to come upon the earth as the small rain upon the tender herb, so there is the constant answer to our cries making glad the hearts of many and bringing blessing to souls in distress. A glance at the book of martyrs shows a long list of honoured witnesses whose prayers describe an intimacy with heaven that carried them through suffering and death. Men like Luther and his companions by their prayers shook the professing Church to its foundations, and of John Knox it is said that a Scottish Queen feared his prayers more than an army of soldiers.

Prayer shall cease; being lost in eternal praise.

A word here at the close on the end in view in all our prayers. Surely it is not only that we might have the mind of heaven and the ways of God but that He in Christ should be so endeared to our hearts as to become the object of our deepest praise. This last will be our eternal employ in a scene where constant prayer is no more called for. We reach this end even now as we apprehend the transfer from our sinful state in Adam to a new creation in Christ. Scripture views us here in a scene of need where God graciously meets us in that need' but it also views us in heavenly associations of life with our risen Head where no needs can come, where all things are of God, and where we can let our hearts out in deepest praise. In the one we are in our pilgrimage where He daily loadeth us with benefits and where we prove His grace: in the other we can be at home in all the blessedness of His complacency and delight. Happy indeed are they who apprehend these things and are able to withdraw from the turmoil of things here to rest in the unclouded blessedness of that scene of joy. Soon there will be no more need to turn again to things of earth but in unbroken continuity praise our God and His blessed Son our Lord by the Spirit's power for evermore. God having recovered man for Himself will rest in the joy of being the eternal Object of their delight; but if possible, more wonderful still is the thought that He can be that Now. It is a grand conception and worthy of a God so great and good that while we are in the scene of needs and where evil abounds He can so fill the soul as to become the Object of its adoring delight. "Hallelujah. Praise ye the Lord from the heavens: praise Him in the heights. Praise ye Him all His angels: praise ye Him all His hosts. Praise ye Him, sun and moon: praise Him all ye stars of light. Praise Him, ye heaven of heavens, and ye waters that be above the heavens. Let everything that hath breath praise the Lord. Hallelujah."