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SERMON XII.

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TIMOTHY'S WORK.*

"Entreat the younger men as brethren.—1 TIMOTHY, v. 1.

THAT which Timothy was to Paul, these Christian Associations are to the church. Their offices were distinct, though nearly related. The one was subordinate to the other—a helper in the service of Christ. But so closely were they united in the one work, each faithful in his peculiar vocation, that there was room for neither misunderstanding nor jealous misconstruction between them. Through his second and third missionary tours, wherever the Apostle went, we find Timothy by his side. Though scarcely nineteen years of age, this youth is preferred by Paul above all the others. They are like-minded. Erastus, Titus, Silvanus, Mark, and Barnabas, men of renown, of tried fidelity, of enlarged experience, are all passed by when a most important errand is to be performed. All care for their own things and

*Preached before the Young Men's Christian Association of New York City at their Anniversary, May 13th, in the Madison Square Presbyterian Church.

SERMON XIII.

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GOD THE HEARER OF PRAYER.*

“O Thou that hearest prayer.”—PSALM lxxv. 2.

There are some philosophical objections to prayer, but the same objections are as good against work. That which would drive a man from his closet would drive him from his field. It were easy to show, after the manner of some, that the weakest thing any man can do is to draw nigh unto God. “He is of one mind, and who can turn him? and what his soul desireth, even that he doeth.” Turn Him, turn Him by any considerations which we may present—the man who approaches the Most High with any such expectations insults him to begin with. Now I can take the same arguments by which the suppliant is convicted of folly, and show that the weakest thing any man can do is to go into the field and put his hand to the plough. God has already determined whether the man shall have a harvest; and he is of one mind, and who can turn him. Can ploughing, and sowing, and harrowing, and all this careful toil avail, if he has decreed that the earth this year shall bring forth no fruit? An attempt to raise a harvest is only an affront to the Infinite Majesty, as if the Creator, in any way, could be circumvented by the creature.

But some will say, it is not to prayer in the abstract, but prayer as represented in the Scriptures, to which we object. Now we cannot deny that there are some strange things revealed in the Bible concerning prayer, and things which ought, if possible, to be explained. It is strange that we should have to ask anything of God. He knows our wants; he is abundantly able to supply them, and has represented himself as more willing to give than any earthly father. Why, then, is the blessing withheld until we come and ask for it? But there is a stranger thing than this. In some cases we must keep coming, keep asking, press our request, become importunate, stand at

* Preached before the General Assembly (New School), at St. Louis, Mo., on Thursday, May 17, 1856, by the Moderator of the last Assembly, Rev. James B. Shaw, D. D.

God's door as the sturdy beggar does at ours, determined not to be sent empty away. And even this will not always suffice. We must wrestle with the Lord, take hold of him, nor let him go, detain him until the day break, constrain him to give the blessing which we seek. Now we would remind any of God's dear children who have been troubled about these things, that our Heavenly Father has other gracious ends to secure by prayer, besides supplying our wants. He who has done a great work for us, has also a great work to do in us, and this work is wrought chiefly through prayer; through communion with the Father of our spirits, and his son Jesus Christ. This is the reason why we must ask, and keep asking, and sometimes wrestle before the blessing comes. There is something beside the blessing, something behind the blessing, and in God's estimation far more important. Will he give only what we ask? Are our desires the measure of his mercies? Do we go to him as the poor man in Judea goes to the oven, and get just as many coals as our potsherd, our broken bits of earthenware, will hold? One of old testified, saying: "He is able to do, exceeding, abundantly, above all that we can ask or think." And this statement is verified by the experience of every man who bows his knees to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

But I have not come hither this morning to remove the objections which have been urged against this Christian duty. No one in this house doubts the efficacy of prayer. Many here would cease to breathe sooner than cease to pray. This is a congregation of supplicants—a company of intercessors—men and women who can tell what great things the Lord hath done for them in answer to their imperfect petitions. As such believers, I address you at the present time, and I am quite confident that I need not solicit your attention while I dwell for a few moments on the thoughts suggested by the text. It is a subject in which every one of us has a heart interest: "O Thou that hearest prayer."

I. *God does hear prayer.* This is the first thing to show. Now prayer is much oftener answered than many disciples of the Lord Jesus are willing to believe. There is sometimes a lurking suspicion in the heart of the believer that after all God is not so ready to hear—not so willing to give. Have you never felt, in some dark day when you went to the mercy seat, again and again, that it is really harder to get anything from God than from a kind and generous-hearted fellow-creature? We hear much about the conditions of prayer—it must be this, and it must be that, and it must be the other thing, or it cannot prevail—and I am afraid we may have heard too much about the conditions of prayer. There seems to be an impression that, while we have

a throne of grace, the Most High has put a tight fence around it; as he did around the mount where he descended of old. Now, the fact is, that no place on earth is so accessible as the mercy seat, and no being so approachable as him who sits thereon. Any one can come, at any hour of the day or night, and never find the door closed, or the One whom he seeks away. How can I doubt that God is willing to give, when there are so many things for which he does not wait to be asked. "He presents us with the blessings of his goodness." He is beforehand with us. How can I doubt that God is willing to give when he leaves so many blessings at the doors which have never yet been opened to him—He the only one suffered to stand and knock? How can I doubt that God is willing to give, when he paid such a price for some of the blessings which he bestows? Remember Bethlehem, remember Gethsemane, remember Calvary, and never again doubt that he is willing to give.

God, then, does hear his children when they call. "He does regard the prayer of the destitute." The unanswered prayer is the exception. When Otho opened the tomb of Charlemagne, he found the once mighty monarch seated on a throne, arrayed in a royal robe, a sceptre in his hand, and none to break the silence or share the solitude. But no dead king sits on the throne which you and I daily approach; and if this King on the mercy-seat does not speak, it is because we could not bear the sound; if he does not shine forth in his glory, it is because we could not endure the sight. No dead king sits on that throne. In the dark ages, when the Pope took umbrage at the treatment of any monarch, he laid his kingdom under what was called an interdict. At midnight each priest, holding a torch in his right hand, chaunted the miserere, and when the dirge was ended the torches were thrown down and extinguished, and the kingdom left in darkness—and darkness it was. No church might be opened while the interdict lasted; no child might be baptized; no grave might be dug in holy ground; no religious rite might be performed. The consecrated bread was taken from the altar; the cross on which the Saviour hung was covered with crape. The bells hung silent in the towers. The women and children stood aghast, as if heaven itself had been shut and they left out.

But even then, one throne might be approached; the throne of the heavenly grace. Even then one ear was open—that ear in which you and I have so often poured our complaints. No dead king sitteth on the throne which we daily approach. God does hear prayer.

II. *But while God does hear prayer, yet he oftentimes answers his children in an unexpected way.* This is the next thing to show. When we pray, if I may be allowed to say it, we necessarily

leave much to the divine discretion of our Heavenly Father. Such is our blindness that we do not know what may be a good thing for us ; much less do we know in what way the blessing should come. The manner in which the mercy is bestowed, sometimes, is far more important than the mercy itself. And yet this must be left with Him, who knows us so much better than we know ourselves. My brother, you have often asked God to subdue your pride, to lay it dead at your feet. You know how he hates it, how hard it is for him to bear with it, and especially to have anything so odious in the heart of his child, and you have oft besought him with tears to cast it out. Did you ever dare to tell him how it should be done? No doubt, if you ventured a suggestion, you would have him deal tenderly with it ; cast it out in a gentle way ; not resort to any severe methods. See that lad rolling on the ground, foaming at the mouth, biting his tongue until the blood starts. What a pitiable sight. But it is now over. It has been too much for the poor boy. Is he not dead? There is no sign of life which any one can discover but the Son of God. Ah! that certainly is not your way of casting out a devil. But it is the Lord's way. Oftentimes nothing short of this will suffice. Brother, before the pride which possesses your heart and mine has been cast out, we may have to go through as much as that lunatic child did. This may be one of the cases where mild methods will only make things worse. A devil is a devil, and pride is something more ; the leader of the gang, the chief of the banditti. Have you not heard that this is the wretch which dares in heaven to strike at God? And can you bind this Samson with a tow string, or a green withe, or his own gory locks twisted into a cord? I have seen more than one man try to tame pride, teach it to speak softly, and walk humbly, and put on sack-cloth and take the lowest seat. I have known more than one man to bring pride into the sanctuary ; to the table of the Lord, and try to make it a good church member. I have looked on as pride stood up in the broad aisle to enter into covenant with God and his people, and heard it say, You thought that I was lifted up, that I carried a high head, and moved with a lofty step—that I felt above coming into the church and identifying myself with the followers of the despised Nazarene. Now confess that for once you were mistaken. See how meek I am ; I would wash the feet of Judas if he were here. Yes, and wear the towel with which you did it, as a badge, all the remainder of your days, and have printed on it in large letters, This is the towel with which I, Pride, washed the feet of the traitor.

Beloved in the Lord, we cannot tame pride. Pride can never forget that it was once in heaven, and there dared to confront the Almighty on his throne. Pride must have the breath beaten

out of it, and it will take perhaps many a hard fall to do it. But this must be left to our Heavenly Father. And how much beside this must we commit to his divine direction? Who would presume to tell him how the blessing which he seeks shall be brought to his door? A creature of yesterday, who knows nothing; a worm of the dust on his way to the tomb, stopping before the throne to tell his Maker what is the wisest thing for him to do. It makes us shudder to think of it. "Who hath directed the spirit of the Lord, or being his counselor hath taught him? With whom took he counsel, and who instructed him, and taught him in the path of judgment, and taught him knowledge, and showed him the way of understanding?"

III. *But I pass to say, in the third place, that sometimes the answer comes in an unwelcome way.* Now God's people, for the most part, look for answers to prayer only in the line of their mercies. There are many here who can bear witness to this; many here who are ready to charge themselves with this mistake. I never thought that a trial, a sore affliction, the blow which broke my heart, could be an answer to prayer; and because so severe and so hard for a father to inflict, the strongest possible proof that the One whom I approach does hear, that the One to whom I have committed all is faithful, is mindful of the covenant, and will send what I need, no matter how much it may cost him. When the prophet stood before the king with that dread alternative, seven months of famine, or three years of war, or three days of pestilence, did the king suspect that the messenger might have come in answer to his prayer? If the offer had been three great mercies: seven months of plenty, three years of peace, or three days, and not a death in the land, the son of Jesse might have said: Now know I that it is not a vain thing to draw nigh unto God. "I waited patiently for the Lord, and he inclined his ear unto me and heard my cry." And here the prophet comes with the answer.

One whom the Lord loveth is sick; you are standing by his side, and what does he say? My dear pastor, I needed this. I deserved it: I have felt for a long time that something of this kind was necessary. There he stops. Let us begin where he leaves off. Brother, this sickness has come in answer to your prayer. You would never have been here had you not besought the Lord so earnestly that you might not fall away from him. Can you not recall the hour when you entered your closet and fell on your face, and with tears that almost drowned your words, besought the Lord to keep you—keep you if he must build a wall of fire round about you? He thought that you were in earnest—that you meant what you said; he took you at your own word, and therefore you are here. How faithful he is.

With what care he watches over you. Alas, that is something of which we seldom think. In numbering our answers to prayer, we begin and end with our mercies.

Jacob, at Bethel, besought the Lord that he would be his God, and the answer came, you say, in his prosperity, in his wealth, in his great triumph at Peniel, when he won the name of Israel; and I contend that the answer came also in the many afflictions which were sent to his door—in the anger of Esau, in the perfidy of Laban, in the loss of Joseph, in the famine which brought him into such straits, in the parting with Benjamin, whom he never expected to see again. David knelt before the Lord and said, "Create within me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me." And the answer came in the ruin of Tamar, in the death of Ammon, in the treason of Absalom, in that rebellion which drove him a fugitive from his throne. I see the aged king going up the sides of Olivet, barefooted, weeping as he goes. I see troubles gathering thick and fast, like thunderclouds, around his head, and it is all in answer to prayer. Peter, I have no doubt, as every good man does, had often asked the Lord to show him his dependence; make him feel that he was nothing; and the answer came in that desertion—that denial—that swearing and cursing which the stones of the pavement must have trembled to hear, and that look of wounded love which broke his heart. When St. Paul returned from Paradise, he came back praying—have you any doubt that he did? Lord, let me not be exalted above measure; let me not be lifted up by those glorious things which I have seen and heard; let me toil as earnestly and suffer as patiently—do my work as cheerfully and as well, as if I had never been to heaven. The Lord heard his cry, and the answer came, in that thorn in the flesh, so sharp, so ragged, so imbedded in the muscles, as not to be extracted by any human skill. "For this thing I besought the Lord thrice that it might depart from me;" and that, O man of God, was thrice too often.

Has it not come in answer to your prayer? Did you not beseech the Lord that you might not be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelation? And this uncomfortable and humiliating thing is the witness that God has heard thee and will not suffer that heavenly vision to prove thy ruin. Would the Lord, to whom thou art so dear, who loved thee so that he could not wait for thee to die, before he took thee to heaven, would he have sent this thorn if anything but this could have kept thee down? And so I have thought, when Paul and Silas were cast into prison, where they were treated with every possible indignity and cruelty; where they were scourged, their bleeding backs washed in brine, their feet made fast in the stocks, and yet were so happy that they could not sleep, and

could not do anything but sing. I have thought that perhaps all this again was in answer to prayer. It may be that the apostle had besought the Lord to give him one more soul in Philippi; and all that befell him that night. And the jailor, with his drawn sword and lighted candle, and face whiter than the wall, trembling before the men fast in the stocks, is the answer to the prayer. O that earthquake not only shook the prison—it wrenched the door from the jailor's heart. Beloved in the Lord, let us be wiser for the days coming, and no longer look for answers to prayer only in the line of our mercies. It is a great mistake, and one which has robbed your soul of many a comfort, and in the dark day when you needed it so much.

IV. But I haste to say once more, that many a prayer, if answered at all, must be answered by an afflictive dispensation—by a terrible thing, as the Psalmist calls it. We are sometimes to choose between the terrible thing and an unanswered prayer. Blessed be God, he does not leave us to make the choice. He chooses for his people, and sends the sore affliction, the terrible thing; sends it, yes, because he knows that he can sustain us under it; because he knows that he can carry us through, and make this trial from which we so shrink, do more for us than any blessing his bountiful hand ever bestowed. This is the thing we overlook when we sit in judgment, and we do sit in judgment on our Maker. Many a man has said, "I would not do as God does. If this were my world, do you think that I would suffer it to be filled with mourning and lamentations and woe? If man were my creature, would I suffer him to shed so many tears, endure so much pain, passing from one disaster to another? And when he had been worn out by misfortune, would I wrap him in a shroud and lay him under the clods, as if I were glad to have him off my hands?" Thomas Guthrie once found a woman in deepest poverty; he besought her, as she seemed near her end, to think of her soul. Her reply was, "I am cold and hungry." He sent for bread, and while the messenger was gone besought her again to think of her soul, and her reply still was, "If you were as cold and hungry as I am you could think of nothing else." Now you say if that woman were my child, if my hand had made her, I would not suffer her to be cold and hungry. Now bear with me while I say if that woman were your child, and you were as great as God, had his resources, could see as he sees, and do as he does, and your heart, like his, were set on some blessed result which could be brought about in no other way, you would suffer her to be cold and hungry. You would suffer your child to be thrown into the den of wild beasts, if you, like God, could stop the mouths of the lions. You would suffer your child to be cast into the

fiery furnace if you, like God, could quench the violence of the fire; if you, like God, could make it sure that the flames would burn nothing but the bonds of your child and consume nothing but the dross; if you were as confident as God is that your child would come forth from that furnace everything that your loving heart could desire. When shall you and I learn that God's ways are not as our ways, nor his thoughts as our thoughts, and that it may be lawful for him to do what it would be madness, and more, for a worm of the dust to attempt. And when shall we learn that these terrible things are answers to prayer, and sent in love as our mercies are, and furnish the highest possible proof that He who sitteth on the throne doth hear. Why are we so sure that God heard Elijah? Because, in answer to his prayer, he did that which it must have been so hard for him to do. "Elijah was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain; and it rained not on the earth for the space of three years and six months." There is the wonderful thing, that the Most High, in answer to any one's prayer, would have sent such a thing as a drought—such a thing as famine; that he, so full of tenderness and love, for three years and six months, would have withheld the rain and the dew because the prophet asked him to do it. Who doubts now that he hears prayer? O it is not that God in answer to the cries of the prophet would open the windows of heaven, but that he would shut them and keep them shut. And here again is something which we would not do. We would not send a drought or a famine. Yes, we would, if we could gain as much from these terrible things as the Lord God of Elijah did.

V. The text suggests one thought more. Prayer is the same thing now that it was in the earlier days of the Christian church. Many doubt it. Many take issue with me here. The age of miracles is past. Have you forgotten it? Those were wonderful times when the blind saw, the deaf heard, the lame leaped, the dumb spake, the dead came forth from the grave as one leaves his bed in the morning. There was some encouragement to pray then. Beloved in the Lord, there is just as much encouragement to pray now. God now can give anything which you and I may lawfully ask, and do it without a miracle, without setting aside the laws which he has ordained, without a direct interposition of His almighty power. To anything we say, which the Christian may lawfully ask, this is the only limitation. It would not be lawful, for instance, to kneel down by the side of that dead child and ask the Lord to restore him to life. There is no reason to believe that any one offered such a prayer in the days gone, unless moved to do it by some special divine impulse. Did David ask the Lord to quicken again that little child in whom his heart was so much bound up? He fasted and wept, and be-

sought God for the child, while it was alive, but his last prayer went up with the last breath of the one so dear. And when that heavier blow came, when Absalom was laid in the neglected grave, where the sinner sleeps, did David ask God to bring him forth? He did not venture to offer such a prayer, any more than you or I would dare to do it. Everything, however, which His child may lawfully ask, God can give, and give without any direct interposition of His Almighty power. How often, it is said such a thing cannot be brought about without a miracle. Now, this is the ground which the unbelieving lord took—the man who paid so dear for his unbelief. The prophet predicted that before another day had gone, food would be plenty in famine-stricken Samaria. “Then a lord, on whose hand the king leaned, answered the man of God and said: Behold if the Lord should make windows in heaven, might this thing be?” But the prediction was fulfilled, as the scoffing man learned to his cost, and no window made in heaven. The prediction was accomplished, through natural causes, by that same kind Providence which gives every one here his daily bread. Now this was left on record that no one, from that hour forth, might distrust the power of Him who sitteth on the throne—that no one might approach Him with a hesitating step and ask in faltering accents as if he did not know whether the All Bountiful One could do it or not. O, child of God, is it not time that there were a stop put to this thing—an end to this shameful unbelief? Shall we limit the Holy One of Israel? Shall we set bounds to infinite love? Shall we hold down the hand which feeds us, and clothes us, and gives us every good thing? How many of God’s dear people dare not open their mouths wide; dare not stretch out both their hands; dare not borrow all the vessels in their neighbor’s house; dare not ask great things, because they are not sure whether the Lord can bring it to pass without a miracle. We return to those words already quoted: “Elijah was a man, subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain, and it rained not on the earth for the space of three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit.” And it was such a rain as had not fallen since the flood. Ahab had to hasten down to his palace, drive as Jehu did, or he would have been intercepted by the swollen stream. Every window in heaven must be opened. How it pours. God goes on as if he repented of having withheld the blessing so long. But what have we here? An Israelite coming out from the houses with a pitcher, or a bowl, or a cup, to catch the shower, as if that cup would hold all that God can afford to give. A rain that was to replenish the tanks, fill the pools, make the fountains flow, set the silent streams to surging again, and this Israelite, coming with his cup to catch it? Now, so it is with us. We go to God, the God who keeps the

sea full and never lets the rivers run dry, in the same spirit when the times of refreshing come, "when there are signs of abundance of rain." When the whole heavens are covered with clouds, and "the skies pour down righteousness," we reach out our little vessel, as if that would hold all that God can afford to give. Beloved in the Lord, had we not better settle the question whether our God is the living and true God; whether He is any stronger or richer, or more bountiful than those who are marching on with us to the grave; whether He did stretch out the heavens; whether He did make all these worlds and hang them upon nothing; whether He did speak, only speak, and it was done; whether he did command, only command, and it stood fast; whether He is the one who said, let there be light, and there was light; the Lord God of Noah, who sent the flood; the Lord God of Elijah, who answered by fire; the Lord God of Peter, who bowed the heavens and came down?

Beloved in the Lord, we, as a church, in our own case, have an interesting illustration of the fact, that God does hear prayer. During the last Assembly, and especially during the morning hour set apart for devotional services, the burden of every prayer was for the outpouring of the Spirit. We felt our need of a baptism of the Holy Ghost, and besought the Lord not to withhold it. So it began and so it ended. And when we parted at Brooklyn, it was with the expectation that God, during the year, would do great things for us. Nor have we been disappointed. "They shall not be ashamed that wait for me." "In the wilderness did waters break out and streams in the desert; the parched ground became a pool, and the thirsty land springs of water," and throughout all our borders there was scarcely an arid spot or a dry fleece. "This is the Lord's doing, it is marvelous in our eyes." And surely it is worthy of record, that no church in our land has received such a blessing as that in which the Assembly met, and that no brother has been so highly favored as the beloved pastor of the Lafayette Avenue church of Brooklyn, whose Christian kindness and courtesy some of us will never forget, so long as we can remember the One who put it into his heart.

"Holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling," we have met at an auspicious time for our beloved Zion. This church, dearer to us than "the ruddy drops which warm our hearts," has seen dark days, has encountered hard storms, sometimes has had to shorten sail, more than once has been caught in the place where two seas meet. There was a time when it was thought that she must go down, and some took to the boats and left her, as they predicted, to her fate. But there is One who never left her, who never thought of leaving her, and because He is in the ship still floats; never so staunch; never so well equipped;

never so thoroughly manned ; never so richly freighted ; never such harmony among the crew ; never making such progress ; never so near the harbor, and sure to make it ; moving majestically on, guided by Him who guided the ark ; and all this in answer to prayer. But for the supplications of God's praying people, this good ship might have foundered, or might have been so crippled, that all the pumps could scarcely keep her afloat. Let us, then, encouraged by our own experience of the divine faithfulness, continue to call on God ; let us keep the censers smoking through the year, remembering that which Satan, above all other things, would have us forget, that the hands which do no work, can never prevail with God. Importunate prayer, earnest work, and that faith which takes the obstacles thrown in her way and makes them the steps by which she reaches the top of the pyramid, are the three things essential to success. Pray, work, toil, and God will make our "walls salvation, and our gates praise," and we, as a church, shall bear our part in bringing about the blessed day, "when the light of the sun shall be sevenfold, as the light of seven days."

We have heard that the Lord is in this place ; that he is pouring on His people here a spirit of grace and supplication ; that some have come to the Saviour ; that others are on the way ; and would it not be a shame to us and a reproach to Zion—might it not even compromise the glory of the Master, if we, while here, should hinder the work—if we should come and go and leave no blessing ? May this be known as the Praying Assembly ; may the good people of St. Louis hold this meeting in grateful remembrance, because by us so many were led to Christ. And when we part, may each one go away with a lighted brand, prepared to kindle anew the flame on that altar where he is appointed to minister.

SERMON XIV.

A SHORT SERMON.

THE LIFE OF CHRIST IN THE SOUL.

"I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me."—GAL. ii. 20.

I. What did Paul mean when he spoke of his Redeemer as living in him ? This, at least, he must have intended to affirm : that the same benevolent sympathies ; the same just principles ; the same spirit of obedience ; the same love to God, and the same devotion to the welfare of men, which had a home in the Saviour's bosom while he was yet in the flesh, were within him, acting upon his life as a guiding, forming power ! When we see an instructor who so commands the respect, and wins the