

COMFORT TO SEEKERS FROM WHAT THE LORD HAS NOT SAID

NO. 508

A SERMON DELIVERED ON SUNDAY MORNING, MAY 10, 1863,
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 AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

“I have not spoken in secret, in a dark place of the earth: I said not unto the seed of Jacob, Seek you Me in vain.”
Isaiah 45:19.

WE might gain much solace by considering what God has *not* said. What He *has* said is inexpressibly full of comfort and delight. What He has *not* said is scarcely less rich in consolation. It was one of these, “*said not*,” which preserved the kingdom of Israel in the days of Jeroboam, the son of Joash. “The Lord said not that He would blot out the name of Israel from under Heaven” (2 Kings 14:27). In our text we have an assurance that God *will* answer prayer, because He has, “*not* said unto the seed of Israel, Seek you My face in vain.” You who write bitter things against yourselves, I would have you remember that. Let your doubts and fears say what they will, if *God* has not cut you off from mercy, there is no room for despair—even the voice of conscience is of little weight if it is not seconded by the voice of God.

What God *has* said tremble at! But suffer not your own fears and suspicions to overwhelm you with despondency and sinful despair. Many timid persons have been vexed by the suspicion that there may be something in God’s decree which shuts *them* out from all hope—some secret, written in the great roll of destiny, which renders it certain that if they *did* pray and seek the Lord—He would not be found of them. Our text is a complete refutation to that troublesome fear. “I have not spoken in secret, in a dark place of the earth. I have not said,” even in the secret of My unsearchable decree, “Seek you My face in vain.” The decrees are “spoken in secret”—the decrees *are* hidden as, “in a dark place of the earth.”

But it is absolutely certain that the Lord has said nothing in any of them, or anywhere else, which can be interpreted to mean, “Seek you My face in vain.” Oh, no, Brothers and Sisters, that Truth which God has so clearly revealed, that He *will* hear the prayer of those who call upon Him, cannot be contravened by anything which God may have spoken elsewhere. He has so firmly, so truthfully, so righteously spoken that there can be no equivocation. He does not, like the Sibyls, speak mysteriously with a double tongue. Nor does He, like the Delphic oracle, reveal His mind in unintelligible words. No, our God speaks plainly and positively, “Ask, and you shall receive.”

O that all of you would accept this sure Truth of God—that prayer must and shall be heard, and that never, even in the secrets of eternity, never, even in the council chamber of the Covenant—has the Lord said unto any living soul, “Seek you My face in vain.”

The proposition I come to deal with this morning is this—that those who seek God, through Jesus Christ, in God’s own appointed way, cannot, by any possibility, seek Him in vain. That earnest, penitent, prayerful hearts, though they may be delayed for a time, can never be sent away with a final denial. “He that calls upon the name of the Lord *shall* be saved. He that seeks, *finds*. He that asks, *receives*. Unto him that knocks it *shall* be opened.” I shall prove this, first, by the negative, as our text has it—“*I have not* said, Seek you Me in vain.” And then, briefly, by the positive. Oh, may God give us His Holy Spirit, that while I am preaching, comfort may be given to many troubled hearts.

I. First, then, BY THE NEGATIVE. It is *not* possible that a man should sincerely, in God’s own appointed way, seek for mercy and eternal life and not find it. It is not possible that a man should earnestly, from his heart, pray unto God, and yet a gracious answer be finally refused. And that for several reasons.

1. We will suppose the case—suppose that sincere prayer could be fruitless—then the question arises, *Why, then, are men exhorted to pray at all?* If prayer is not heard, if supplication may possibly end in a failure, why does God so constantly, so earnestly, so strenuously constrain and command men to call upon Him? Would it not be a heartless cruelty on my part, if I saw a poor farmer who could not pay his way, if I exhorted him to plow upon a rock, and scatter the little seed he had upon soil where I knew it could never grow? Or if a king imposed upon his poor subject a law that he should

plow the seashore, and harrow it, and exercise all the arts of husbandry upon it—when he was perfectly aware that not a single grain could ever bless the farmer’s toil?

What would you think of any man who should advise a thirsty wretch to pump an empty well? Suppose some sovereign should enjoin it upon his subject, seeing he is ready to die of thirst, to let the bucket down where there is no water and to continue to do it without ceasing—to be always letting down the bucket and always winding it up—with the absolute certainty that no good can come of it! And do you think that God, who commands men to pray and not to faint, would bid them do it, if no harvest could be reaped from it? Does He tell them to continue in prayer, to, “pray without ceasing”—to watch unto prayer, to arise in the night watches and cry unto Him—and yet, after all, has He settled it that He will be deaf to their entreaties and despise their cries?

Would it not be a piece of heartless tyranny if the Queen should wait upon a man in his condemned cell and encourage him to petition her favor, no, *command* him to do it, saying to him, “If I do not send you at once an answer, send another petition and another. Send to me seven times, yes, continue to do it, and never cease so long as you live. Be importunate and you will prevail.” And what if the Queen should tell the man the story of the importunate widow, should describe to him the case of the man, who, by perseverance, obtained the three loaves for his weary friend? And then say to him, “Even so, if you ask you shall receive”? And yet all the while should intend never to pardon the man, but had determined in her heart that his death warrant should be signed and sealed and that on the execution morning he should be launched into eternity?

I ask you, Brothers and Sisters, whether this were consistent with royal bounty, whether this were fit conduct for a gracious monarch. And can you for a moment suppose that God would bid you, as He does each one of you, to seek His face—would He bid you come to Him through Jesus Christ—and yet, secretly in His heart, intend never to be gracious at the voice of your cry?

2. Further, for a second argument—if prayer could be offered continuously, and God could be sought earnestly—but no mercy found, then *he who prays would be worse off than he who does not pray*. And supplication would be an ingenious invention for increasing the ills of mankind. For a man who does not pray has less woes than a man who does pray, *if* God is not the Answerer of prayer. The man who prays is made to hunger—shall he hunger, and not eat! Were it not, then, better never to hunger? How, then, can it be said, “Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness”? The man who prays, thirsts. As the hart pants after the water brooks, so he pants after his God.

But if God will never give him the living water to drink, is not a thirsty soul much more wretched than one who never learned to thirst at all? He who has been taught to pray has great desires and wants. His heart is an aching void which the world can never fill. But he that never prays has no longings after God. He that never makes supplication feels no ungratified desires after eternal things. If, then, a man may have these vehement longings, and yet God will never grant them, then assuredly the man who prays is in a worse position than he who prays not.

How can this be? Has God so constituted the world that virtue shall entail misery, and that vice shall engender happiness? Can it be, while God is the moral Ruler of the universe, that He will reward the man who forgets Him, and will pour misery into the soul of the man who earnestly seeks His face? It is blasphemy to suppose it! The beasts in the field do not lament that they are not immortal, for they never had aspirations after immortality. A gracious God has limited their ambition to their attainments—but if the ox could groan after Heaven, if the sheep could pray for a resurrection—it were a wretched creature, indeed, to be denied these things.

So the ungodly man, like the beast of the field, has no longing after God’s favor. He has no yearnings after eternal life, no desire to be conformed to the image of Christ—and his ambitions are so far limited to what he gains. But shall it be that a soul shall pant to be like God, shall thirst to be reconciled to his Maker, shall hunger even to faintness, that he may find, “peace with God through Jesus Christ,” and yet shall such desires as these be only given to make him wretched? I cannot suppose such a thing! The absurdity of imagining that the man who *does* pray, would be by God put in a worse position than the man who does not, seems to me to be at once convincing that the earnest, faithful prayer shall certainly, through the merit of Christ, prevail with God.

3. But I go a step further. If God does not hear prayer, since it is clear that in that case the praying man would be more wretched than the careless sinner, then it would follow that *God would be the Author of unnecessary misery*. Now we know that this is inconsistent with the Character of our God. We look around the world and we see punishment for sin,

but no punishment for good desires. We discover that the Fall has brought us loss and ruin. And we know that there is a dreadful Hell where justice shall be executed to the uttermost.

But I see no chamber of arbitrary torture, where God, the Almighty, takes pleasure in the undeserved pangs and unmerited groans of His own creatures! I do not see a single invention made by God to give pain unnecessarily. I find not a joint of my body, no, not a sinew or a muscle, that is intended to *cause* me anguish. They may all be racked with aches and pains, since I am a fallen, sinful man. But the body was not organized with a view to pain, but for pleasure. And do you think that God would ingeniously put up a Mercy Seat to increase human misery by a mockery of Divine Grace, a mimicry of bounty?

Do you dream that He would send out commands to men, obedience to which would entail upon them greater sorrow than disobedience could bring? Do you think that He would woo them with outstretched hands to be more wretched than they were before? Would He be so false and heartless as to bid them come, knowing that their coming would only make them ten-fold more unhappy than they were already, because He did not intend to accept them when they did come? He that can think thus of my God does not know Him. He who could dream that it is possible for Him to invite and incite in you the prayer He has promised to hear, and yet, after all, would reject it, must surely be comparing Jehovah to Juggernaut. He knows not what Jehovah is.

Know you not that prayer, itself, is the *work* of God? Prayer is not the *act* of the *creature*, but the *work* of the *Creator*. Prayer is God in man coming back to God. Prayer is the fruit of Divine life. And do you believe that God would Himself write upon the human heart prayers which He did not intend to hear? Do you think the Holy Spirit would dictate petitions which God, the Eternal Father, had determined to reject? No, no, no! We must, from this negative way of reasoning, be persuaded that our God will hear and answer prayer.

4. Should there still be some desponding ones, who think that God would invite them to pray and yet reject them, I would put it on another ground. *Would men do so?* Would even *you*, full of sin though you are, so treat your own fellow creature? I know that we should hold up to scorn any rich man who should say to beggars in the streets, “I live in such-and-such a place. It is six miles off. If you will all come tomorrow morning at eight o’clock and knock at my door, repeating my son’s name, I will supply your wants.” And what if, when he had collected the poor beggars, he should let them stand and knock according to his bidding till they were weary and never grant them an answer?

If he should let them know that there was bread within the house, but not a morsel for *them*, we should say, “Well, if men must make themselves merry with practical jokes, let them not be carried out upon the poor and needy. Let them find some other victims, and let not the helpless mendicants of the streets be the victims of such foolish mirth.” And shall it be possible for my God to be less generous than men?

Do we not find continually, if there is an hospital opened to relieve the sick, or to heal the maimed, that when much injured persons make an application they are received? I know not that there are any peculiar hearts of compassion in those who have the oversight of the hospital, but I do know this—there is so much of the milk of human kindness in their bosoms, that the moment a poor wretch is brought to the door almost dead—if it were a slighter case they might take some exception—the very desperateness of the case throws open the hospital door, and at once the patient is admitted.

Man is in such a case, near to die, no, condemned and utterly ruined by his sin—and I do not believe that my God will shut His door in the face of misery. Rather, I am persuaded that the very desperateness of the case will make an appeal to His heart and He *will* fulfill His promise. It is a low ground to put it on, I will admit, for God is infinitely more loving than man. “As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are His ways higher than our ways, and His thoughts than our thoughts.” And if a *man* would not reject the supplication which he had himself invited—if a *man’s* heart would be moved to pity by the cry of misery—much more the heart of the All-Bounteous God, whose very name is Love, and whose Nature it is to give liberally without upbraiding. I am persuaded, therefore, that He must, and will hear prayer.

5. Yet further—have you forgotten that this *is God’s memorial, by which He is distinguished from the false gods?* “They have ears, but they hear not, hands have they, but they help not their worshippers. And feet have they, but they come not to the rescue of their votaries. But *our* God made the heavens, and this is His memorial, the God that hears prayer.” Has not David put it—“O You that hear prayer, unto You shall all flesh come”? One of the standing proofs of the Deity of Jehovah is that He does, to this day, answer the supplications of His people.

But suppose that any one among you could seek His face day after day, week after week, and month after month, and yet He should refuse you—where would His memorial be? O if yonder poor sinner, with tears and plaintive cries were really to besiege the Mercy Seat in the name of Jesus, and God, the Almighty Father, should refuse him and drive him away, I say, where is the boasted name of God? I grant you, the answer may tarry, but only that it may be the more sweet when it comes. I know the ships of Heaven may be long upon the voyage, but only that they may bring a richer cargo to you.

But come they must. “If the vision tarry, wait for it. It *shall* come. It shall not tarry.” For otherwise, I say, where is the glory of God? How is He distinguished above Baal? How is He exalted above the gods of the heathen? Did not Elijah put it to the test? The priests of Baal cried—they cut themselves with knives. From morning to evening their shrieks went up to Heaven and the sarcastic Prophet said, “Cry aloud, for he is a god! Perhaps he is on a journey, or he sleeps and must be awakened.” All day long the lancers drew forth priestly blood. But no voice came from Baal.

Clear the stage and let God’s servant come. He lifts his hands to Heaven and cries—“Lord God of Abraham, Isaac and of Israel, let it be known this day that You are God in Israel, and that I am Your servant, and that I have done all these things at Your word. Hear me, O Lord, hear me, that this people may know that You are the Lord God, and that You have turned their heart back again.” Down falls the fire of the Lord, consuming not only the bullock, but the stones of the altar and the water in the trench! For our God *does* hear prayer.

Now do you see, Soul, that your despair, when you say He will not hear you, really takes away from God one of His grandest titles? You do Him a serious dishonor in supposing that He will refuse to hear you. You cast mire upon the escutcheon of Deity, and think unworthily of the Most High when you imagine for an instant that He would teach you to pray, and come to Him through the blood of Christ—and yet refuse to hear the voice of your groaning.

6. Surely these arguments might well suffice. But if unbelief has as many lives as a cat, as John Bunyan says, I will deal it the full nine blows and one over, to make assurance doubly sure.

If God does not hear prayer—suppose such to be the case for a moment—then I want to know—what are the meaning of His promises? I ask, with all reverence, how He shall make His veracity to be proved, if He does not answer His people? Let me give you one or two of His own promises—“Call upon Me in the day of trouble, and I *will* deliver you, and you *shall* glorify Me.” “He *shall* call upon Me and I *will* answer him.” What does this mean, by the mouth of Isaiah—“He *will* be very gracious unto you at the voice of your cry. When He shall hear it, He *will* answer you.” That is neither more nor less than a falsehood, if God does not hear prayer.

What about this splendid passage—“And it shall come to pass, that before they call I will answer, and while they are yet speaking I *will* hear”? And this by Zechariah—“They *shall* call on My name and I *will* hear them. I will say, It is My people and they shall say, The Lord is my God”? Can there be words plainer than these, from the lips of the Savior—“Ask and it *shall* be given you. Seek and you *shall* find, knock and it *shall* be opened to you. For *everyone* that asks receives, and he that seeks finds. And to him that knocks it *shall* be opened”? Or these, “If you, then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in Heaven give good things to them that ask him?”

And what is the meaning of this great promise—“And *all* things, whatsoever you shall ask in prayer, believing, you *shall* receive”? Are not these so many arrows shot at the very heart of unbelief? I begin at that ancient writing, the Book of Job. “He *shall* pray unto God, and he *will* be favorable unto Him, and he *shall* see His face with joy.” The Psalms are crowded with such promises, and even the Prophet Joel, who is full of thunder and lightning—even he says, “Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord *shall be delivered*”—which the Apostle Paul, in the Epistle to the Romans, varies a little, and puts it—“For whoever shall call upon the name of the Lord *shall be saved*.”

Even James, who is all practical, and very little comforting, cannot get through the Epistle without saying, “Draw near to God and He *will* draw near to you.” Why, even under the old Law, Deuteronomy had a promise like this—“If you shall seek the Lord your God, you *shall* find Him, if you seek Him with all your heart and with all your soul.” Under the rule of the kings, we find it written, “If you seek Him, He will be found of you.” So might I go on quoting promises, until you were weary with hearing my voice. But, my dear Friends, I ask you, if God does not hear prayer, after saying what I have repeated to you, where is His truthfulness?

He *must* be true, if every man is a liar—God’s own Word *must* stand—though Heaven and earth should pass away. Like flowers, you nations, you shall die. Like a dream, you kingdoms, you shall melt. Like a shadow, O you mountains, you shall dissolve. Like a wreck, O earth, you shall be broken into pieces. Like a worn out gesture, O you heavens, you shall be rolled up. But every Word of God is sure and steadfast, “yes, and amen in Christ Jesus.” “The voice said, Cry. And I said, What shall I cry? All flesh is grass and all the goodness thereof is as the flower of the field. The grass withers and the flower thereof fades away. But the Word of the Lord endures forever.” How can we find arguments stronger than this?

7. Another stroke. If God has virtually said to us, “Pray, but I will never hear you. Seek My face in vain,” then I ask, what is the meaning of all the provisions which He has already made for hearing prayer? I see a way to God. It is paved with stones inlaid in the fair crimson of the Savior’s blood. I see a door. It is the wounded side of Jesus. Why was that blood shed, if God hears not prayer? Why that side rent if, after all, the veil still shuts out from access to the Mercy Seat? Moreover, in Heaven I see a Mediator between God and man. But why a Mediator, if God will not be at peace with man nor hear his prayer?

Moreover, I see an Intercessor. I see the Son of God stretch His wounded hands, and point to His side, wearing the jeweled breastplate on His forefront. But why the breastplate, and why the High Priest, if prayer is a futile thing, and God has said, “Seek you My face in vain”? Moreover, I see all the marvelous transactions of the Covenant from first to last. And I ask, Why all this, if it is not meant for sinners who seek His face? Moreover, I see the blessed Spirit. He, Himself, condescends to dwell in us, and make, “intercession for us with groaning which cannot be uttered.” And I ask of you, O Melancholy and Despair, why was this Spirit sent? Why this blood shed? Why this Savior ordained and exalted on high, “to give repentance and remission of sins,” if remission is never to be given, repentance never to be accepted and intercession never to be heard?

By every wound of Jesus I beg you, Sinner, to believe that God will hear you! By every drop of that precious blood, by every cry of those dying lips, by every tear of those languid eyes, by every smart of that bruised back, by every jewel of that crown of glory, by every precious stone upon that priestly breastplate, by every honor which God the Father has bestowed upon our Lord Jesus—yes, by all the power of the blessed Spirit, by all the energy with which He raised Christ from the dead, by all the “power” with which He is acknowledged to be God—I do beg you to never doubt but that God will in due time be gracious to the voice of your cry.

8. Still to pursue this dying foe, whom methinks we might have slain outright by this time, I use the argument which the Apostle uses upon the resurrection. If God does not hear prayer, *what Gospel have I to preach?* As the Apostle said, concerning the resurrection, “Then is our preaching vain and your faith is also vain. You are yet in your sins.” If God does not hear prayer, I say, our preaching is in vain. We are sent to tell men that, “though their sins are as scarlet, they shall be as wool. Though they are red like crimson, they shall be whiter than snow”—if they will turn from their evil ways, and *seek* the Lord.

But if they can turn, and yet not be accepted, I, for my part, renounce my commission, for I have not a Gospel that is worth the preaching. And surely *you* would say, “It is not a Gospel worth our acceptance.” If prayer, offered in Jesus’ name, is not accepted, taking Paul’s line of argument, then Christ is not accepted. If the sinner’s plea, “for Jesus’ sake,” is not heard, then is Christ not heard? And if Christ is not heard and accepted, then our preaching is in vain, and your faith is in vain. Yes, and we are found false witnesses for God, because we have testified of God that He hears the intercession of Jesus, whom He hears not if He hear not those who plead His name.

9. Further, my Brothers and Sisters—and here we strike the ninth blow—if this could be removed, *where is the Believer’s hope?* Hang the heavens in sackcloth, let the sun be turned to darkness, let the moon become a clot of blood if the Mercy Seat can be proved to be a mockery! Oh, if God would let His people cry and not be gracious, better for us that we had never been born! The most happy saint, in his best moment, would be as wretched as the damned in Hell, if he were persuaded that God did not, and could not, hear prayer.

What would we have to comfort us in our hours of trouble, what to strengthen us in our times of labor, what refuge from the storm, what cover from the heat? Where, where, my Brothers and Sisters, could we fly, if the Throne of Grace were a fiction? Heaven, surely, is shut, when the gate of prayer is shut. Surely every blessing will pass away at once, when prayer ceases to avail. The ladder which Jacob saw would be drawn up into Heaven, and from now on, there would be no

communion between God and man. Glory be to God, such a thing cannot be! Sinner, you think that God would never hurt His saints, but that He would reject *you*. But see, if He refuses to hear *you*, the rule is broken, and the rule, being once broken—there being *one* exception—the whole stability of the saints' comfort is removed at a blow.

10. I close this negative view of the subject by asking, in the tenth place, What would they say in Hell if a soul could really seek the Lord and be refused? Oh, the unholy merriment of devils! "Here's a soul," says one, "that perished, though it prayed! Here's a hand that touched the hem of Jesus' garment, but that garment did not heal! Here are lips scorched with burning fire which once were warm with living prayer." Methinks they would drag such a one in triumph through the streets of Tophet. They would crowd the thoroughfares to look on. And oh, what dread acclaim of scorn!

What thundering laughter would go up! "Aha! Aha! Aha," they would say, "Where is the boasted Savior now? He lied unto men's souls! He promised, but He did not give. He taught them to pray—and made them begin their Hell on earth—and then threw them into Hell forever." Could it be? Oh, could it be? What would praying men do in Hell? I remember that story of Mrs. Ryland, a good Christian woman, who, when she lay dying, was very, very sad, and her husband said to her, "You are dying, my Dear?" "Yes," she said. "And where are you going?" he asked. She replied, "Ah, John, I'm going to Hell."

"And what will you do there?" he asked her. Well, that had not struck her, what she should do there. "Do you think," he asked, "you will leave off praying, Betsy?" "No, John," she said, "even if I were in Hell, I would pray." "Oh, but," said he, "they'd say, 'Here's praying Betsy Ryland here—turn her out—this isn't a fit place for her.'" And so methinks if one of you could go there with a prayer upon your lips, pleading and crying, they would either rejoice over you, as a proof that God was not true, or else they would say, "Turn her out. We cannot bear prayers in Hell. We could not bear to hear the voice of earnest supplication among the shrieks and curses of lost spirits."

I have been arguing against a thing which you know theoretically is not possible. But yet there are some who, when they are under conviction of sin, still cleave to this dark delusion—that God will not hear *them*. Therefore, I have tried by blow after blow, if possible, to smite this fear dead. When Jael did but take one nail and hammer, she was able to smite Sisera through his brain with it. Since I have used ten nails, and have given the ten as lusty strokes with the hammer as I could give them, O may God make them strong enough to strike the Sisera of unbelief dead at your feet!

II. Now, for a very little time, THE POSITIVE VIEW OF THE QUESTION. That the Lord does hear prayer, we think, may be positively substantiated by the following considerations:

For the Lord to hear prayer is *consistent with His Nature*. Whatever is consistent with God's Nature, in the view of a sound judgment, we believe is true. Now, we cannot perceive any attribute of God which would stand in the way of His hearing prayer. It might be supposed that His justice would. But that has been so satisfied by the atonement of Christ, that it rather pleads the other way. Since Christ has "put away sin," since He has *purchased* the blessing, it seems but just that God should accept those for whom Jesus died, and give the blessing which Christ has bought.

All the attributes of God say to a sinner, "Come, come! Come to the Throne of Grace, and you shall have what you want." *Power* puts out his strong arm and cries, "I will help you! Fear not." *Love* smiles through her bright eyes, and cries, "I have loved you with an everlasting love, therefore with the hands of kindness have I drawn you." *Truth* speaks in her clear, plain language, saying, "He that seeks finds. To him that knocks it *shall* be opened." *Immutability* says, "I am God. I change not. Therefore you are not consumed." Every single attribute of the Divine Character—you can think of these as well as I can—pleads for the man who prays, and I do not know—I never dreamed of a single attribute of Deity which could enter an objection. Therefore, methinks if the thing really will *glorify* God, and not dishonor Him, He will certainly do it.

"Oh, but," you say, "I am such a great sinner." That gives me another argument. *Would it not greatly extol the love and the Grace of God* for Him to give His Grace to those that deserve it least? To give to a man what he deserves is no charity. To bestow a favor upon those who have a *little* offended, is no very great act of beneficence. But to choose out the biggest rebel in His dominions, and to say to that rebel, "I forgive you"! Yes, to take that rebel, and to adopt him into His family, adorn him with jewels, and set a crown of gold upon his head—is this the manner of men, O Lord God? No, it is in such cases that we see the broad distinction between the leniency of human sovereigns, and the mighty Sovereign Grace which is in the King of kings.

The worse you make your case out to be, the better is my argument. The worse the disease, the more credit to the physician who heals. The worse the sin, the more glory to the astounding mercy which puts it away! The greater the rebel, the more triumphant that Divine Grace which makes that rebel into a child of God. I say that the greatness of your sin may act as a foil to set forth the brightness of God's love. And herein, because the hearing of your unworthy prayers, and the listening to the cry that comes out of your polluted lips—because this would honor Him—I am persuaded He will do it.

Further, though these two reasons would suffice, let me notice that it is *harmonious with all His past actions*. If you want a history of God's dealings with men, turn to the 107th Psalm. There you find travelers lost, like you, in a desert. They wander in a wilderness in a solitary way. They find no city to dwell in. The water is spent in the bottle. The bread is exhausted from the camels' backs. They find no well. They perceive no way—they follow this path, then that. At last, hungry and thirsty, their souls fainted within them, up from the desert's parched sand there arose to the burning sky the voice of wailing, "O God, spare us and let us live."

How is it written? "He delivered them out of their distresses. And He led them forth by the right way, that they might go to a city of habitation." For it says, "He satisfies the longing soul, and fills the hungry soul with goodness." That is not told us as the *exception*, but as the *rule*. This is God's way of dealing with men. When they are lost and turn to Him, He hears them. "Ah," you say, "I am lost, but I am not like those travelers. I am lost by reason of my own sin."

The next case in this Psalm will suit you. Here we find rebels brought into prison. They have been rebelling against the Word of God, and they have condemned the counsel of the Most High. Therefore He brought them down by labor. They fell down, and there was none to help. Then they cried unto God in their trouble. Did He hear them? These were "rebels," fitly and properly put in prison, justly and rightly fettered with iron. Do you wear the fetters of conscience and the chains of terror? Are you in the prison of the Law? So long as you are not in the final prison of Hell, if you call upon God in your trouble, you will find it with you as it was with them. "He brought them out of darkness and the shadow of death, and broke their bands in sunder."

"Oh, but," says another, "I have got into trouble through my sin. But I do not know how to pray as I should, I am such a stupid blockhead." Then the next case is yours. "Fools because of their transgression, and because of their iniquities, are afflicted." One of these "fools" had brought on disease by his sin, and he was so sorely sick that he lost all appetite. He abhorred all manner of meat and drew near to the gates of death. This fool, what sort of prayer did *he* pray? Why, a fool's prayer, certainly. But even a fool's prayer God will hear, as it is written, "He sent His Word and healed them and delivered them from their destructions." So, if you are ever so great a fool, and the suffering you now feel has been brought on you through your own folly, yet He *will* hear you.

"Ah, but," you say, "I have been such a bragging fellow, such a boaster. And I have done such terrible deeds in my day." What is the next case? The case of the sailor. You know, we generally reckon that seafaring men do not care for much. They are daredevils and rap out an oath without compunction. And in the olden times, I dare say, they were worse than they are now, so that when they did get ashore they were a very pattern of everything mischievous and bad. But here we have a crew of sailors in a storm. They had, no doubt, been cursing and swearing in the calm, but here comes a storm.

They go up to Heaven, and then they go down again into the depths—"They reel to and fro and stagger like a drunken man," for they cannot walk across the deck. The ship reels, "they are at their wits end," and they think, "Surely she will go to the bottom." Then they cry unto God. There was no chaplain on board. Who prayed? Why, the boatswain, and the captain, and the crew—and I dare say they did not know how to put the words together. They were more used to swearing than to praying—but they went down on their knees on deck—clinging to mast and bulwark and tiller, and they cried, "O God! O God! Save us! The ocean swallows us up! God of the tempest deliver us."

And did He hear the sailor's prayer? Did He hear the cries, the frantic cries, of sinking men? Read here. "He makes the storm a calm, so that the waves thereof are still. Then are they glad because they are quiet. So He brings them unto their desired haven." Well now, you that have been accustomed to cursing and swearing, and say, "What is the use of my praying?" here is a case which just suits you. And this is the rule, I say again, not the exception. And I argue, therefore, from the past acts and ways of God, that He does hear prayer.

Besides, here is another argument for you. What does He mean by His promises? As I said negatively, if He did not hear, where are His promises? So I say positively this time, *because* of His promises, He *must* hear. God is free, but His

promises bind Him. God may do as He wills, but He always wills to do what He has said He will do. We have no claim upon God, but God makes a claim for us. When He gives a promise, we may confidently plead it. I venture to say that promises made in Scripture are God's engagements, and that as no honorable *man* ever runs back from his engagements, so a God of honor and a God of truth cannot, from the necessity of His Nature, suffer one of His Words to fall to the ground.

In this little book, *Clarke's Promises*, which one likes to have always near, you find two or three chapters containing collected promises of the Lord—that He will answer secret prayer and listen to the voice of penitents. But I shall not occupy our time with promises which you can find in your Bibles at home. Only “let God be true and every man a liar.” If God promises, He must and will perform, or else He were not true. While we dare to say that God's answering prayer is certified by abundance of facts in our own experience, we observe that the best proof is to *try for yourself*. It is said that there is no learning to ride except on a horse's back. And I believe there is no learning any Truth of God except by experiencing it.

If you want to know the depravity of the human heart, you must find it out when you look at your daily imperfections. And if you would know that God hears prayer, you must test the fact, for you will never learn it through my saying, “He heard *me*”—you will only know it through His having heard *you*. And I would, therefore, exhort you—all of you who are now within reach of this voice of mine. Since it is not a perhaps, a chance, a maybe, a haphazard—but since it is a *dead*—I must not use that word—since it is a *living* certainty, that, “he that asks receives, and he that seeks finds,” go to your houses, fall upon your knees and pray to God!

Pray to Him even now in your pews, to save your souls. Ambition tempts you to disappointment. Riches charm you to speculations which will lead to failure. Your own passions drive you to pleasures which end in pain. The best the world can promise you is a *perhaps*. But my Master presents to you, “the *sure* mercies of David”—certainties—infallible certainties. Will you not have them? O may the Spirit of God lead you to accept them. In your pew you may pray! In that aisle the silent cry may go up to Heaven! In your little narrow chamber, or in the saw pit, or in the garden, or the field, or in the street, or in the prison cell—wherever *you* have a heart to pray, *God* has an ear to hear.

No words are wanting, except such as spring spontaneously to the lips. Tell Him you are a wretch undone without His Sovereign Grace. Tell Him you have no hope in yourself. Tell Him you have no merits! Tell Him you cannot save yourself. Say, “*Lord*, save, or I perish!” It was Peter's sinking prayer. But it preserved him from drowning. Say, “God be merciful to me, a sinner”! It was the publican's prayer in the temple. It justified him.

Bring a suffering Savior before a gracious God—point to the wounds of Jesus, and say, “O God! Though my heart is hard as a millstone, Christ's heart was broken. Though my conscience is not tender and is callous, yet the flesh of Christ was tender and it smarted sorely. Though *I* can give no atonement, Christ gave it—though *I* bring no merits, yet I plead the merits of Jesus.” And let me say to you, pray as if you meant it, and continue as Elijah did, till you get the blessing.

I would to God that some of you would never rise from your knees till God has heard you! Plead with Him as a man pleads for his life! Clutch the horns of the altar as the drowning man clutches the life buoy to which he clings. Lay hold on God, as Jacob grasped the angel—and do not let Him go until He blesses you, for “thus says the Lord, I have not spoken in secret, in a dark place of the earth. I said NOT unto the seed of Jacob, seek you My face in vain”!

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