

# Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

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ESSENTIAL POINTS IN PRAYER.

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## A Sermon

INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, JANUARY 20TH, 1889,

DELIVERED BY

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“The Lord appeared to Solomon the second time, as he had appeared unto him at Gibeon. And the Lord said unto him, I have heard thy prayer and thy supplication, that thou hast made before me: I have hallowed this house, which thou hast built, to put my name there for ever; and mine eyes and mine heart shall be there perpetually.”—1 Kings ix. 2, 3.

BELOVED friends, it was an exceedingly encouraging thing to Solomon that the Lord should appear to him before the beginning of his great work of building the temple. See in the third chapter of this First Book of the Kings, at the fifth verse, “In Gibeon the Lord appeared to Solomon in a dream by night: and God said, Ask what I shall give thee.” Some of us remember how the Lord was with us at the beginning of our life-work, when we started as young men and women newly converted, full of zeal and earnestness, determined to do something for the Lord. How we sought his face!—with what simplicity, with what tenderness of heart, with what dependence upon him and diffidence as to ourselves! We remember, as HE remembers, the love of our espousals—those early days. I cannot forget when the Lord appeared unto me in Gibeon at the first. Truly there are things about the lives of Christian men that would not have been possible if God had not appeared to them at the beginning. If he had not strengthened and tutored them, and given them wisdom beyond what they possess in themselves; if he had not inspirited them; if he had not infused life into them, they had not done what they have already done. It is a priceless blessing to begin with God, and not to lay a stone of the temple of our life-work till the Lord has appeared unto us. I do not know, however, but that it is an equal, perhaps a superior, blessing for the Lord to appear to us after a certain work is done; even as in this case: “The Lord appeared to Solomon the second time, as he had appeared unto him at Gibeon.” Solomon had now finished the temple, and he needed another visit from on high. There is great joy in completing a work; and yet there is, to some minds, a great drop, when the once engrossing service ceases to keep the mind upon the stretch.

You run up hill, and you have gained the summit; there is no more climbing, for the present, and then you almost wish that you had to struggle again. A work like that of Solomon lasting for seven years must have become a delight to him: to see the house growing, and to mark all the stages of its beauty. And so it is with any special and notable work which we are called to do early in life. We get wedded to it, we are glad to see it grow under our hand; and when at last that particular portion of our service is finished, we feel a kind of loss. We have grown used to the pull upon the collar, we have almost leaned upon it, and we feel a difference when we are at the top of the hill. Personally I never feel exhilaration at a success, but a certain sinking of heart when the tug of war is over. We see the like in the story of God's greater servants; we note it specially in Elias when he had performed his mighty work on Carmel, and slain the prophets of Baal: he felt an exultation in his spirit for a while, and he ran before the chariot of the king in the joy of his soul; but there came a reaction afterwards of a very painful kind. The case of Solomon is not parallel; and yet I should think that it might have been and probably was so with Solomon, that he was in a condition of special need when the temple was finished. He may have been in peril of pride, if not of depression: in either case it was a remarkable season, and its need must have been remarkable also; "and so the Lord appeared unto Solomon the second time, as he had appeared unto him in Gibeon."

Brethren, we want renewed appearances, fresh manifestations, new visitations from on high; and I commend to those of you who are getting on in life, that while you thank God for the past, and look back with joy to his visits to you in your early days, you now seek and ask for a second visitation of the Most High; not that I do not think that you have visitations from God full often, and walk in the light of his countenance; but still, though the ocean is often at flood—twice every day—yet it has its spring-tides. The sun shines whether we see it or not, right through our winter's fog, and yet it has its summer brightness. If we walk with God constantly, yet are there seasons when he opens to us the very secret of his heart, and manifests himself to us, not only as he does not unto the world, but as he does not at all times to his own favoured ones. All days in a palace are not days of banqueting, and all days with God are not so clear and glorious as certain special Sabbaths of the soul in which the Lord unveils his glory. Happy are we if we have once beheld his face; but happier still if he again comes to us in fulness of favour.

I think that we should be seeking those second appearances: we should be crying to God most pleadingly that he would speak to us a second time. We do not want a re-conversion, as some assert. I hope that we do not; if the Lord has kept us, as we should be, steadfast in his fear, we are already possessors of what some call "the higher life." This we have many of us enjoyed from the very first hour of our spiritual life. We do not need to be converted again; yet we do want that again over our heads the windows of heaven should be opened, that again a Pentecost should be given, and that we should renew our youth like the eagles, to run without weariness, and walk without fainting. The Lord fulfil to everyone of his people to-night his

blessing upon Solomon! "The Lord appeared to Solomon the second time, as he had appeared unto him at Gibeon."

Now, what the Lord spoke upon in the commencement of his interview with Solomon concerned his prayer; and as the Lord answered that prayer, and here, in this second appearance, recapitulated the points of it, we may be sure that there was much about that prayer which would make it a model for us. We shall do well to pray after the manner which successful pleaders have followed. In this case we will follow the Lord's own description of an accepted prayer. I shall use the text to that end briefly in two or three ways.

#### I. First, OUR PROPER PLACE IN PRAYER.

The Lord said, "I have heard thy prayer, and thy supplication, that thou hast made *before me*."

There is the place to pray—"before me": that is to say, before the Lord.

Let us talk a little about this matter.

"Where'er we seek HIM he is found,  
And every place is hallowed ground."

But we should take care that the place is hallowed by our prayer being deliberately and reverently presented before God.

*This place is not always found.* The Pharisee went up to the temple to pray, and yet, evidently, he did not pray "before God"; so that even in the most holy courts he did not find the place desired. In his own esteem he prayed; but, in his going home to his house without justification, there was evidence that he either had not prayed at all, or that he had not prayed before God. It is not because you pass these portals, and come into these pews, that therefore you are before God. Nay, and if you were to seek the shrines which have been most eminently regarded in the church; if you stood by the site of Jerusalem, if you sought out that little skull-like hill called "Calvary," and prayed there, or if you went to Olivet, and bowed your knee in Gethsemane, you might not therefore be before God. The nearer the church, sometimes, the farther from God; and in the very centre of it, in the midst of the assembly where prayer is wont to be made, you may not be "before God" at all. Praying before God is a more spiritual business than is to be performed by turning to the east or to the west, or bowing the knee, or entering within walls hallowed for ages. Alas! it is easy enough to pray, and not to pray before God. And it is not so easy—it is indeed a thing not to be done except by the power of the Spirit—to "enter into that which is within the veil," and to stand before the mercy seat, all blood-besprinkled, consciously and really in the presence of the Invisible, to fulfil that precept, "Ye people, pour out your hearts before him." "Before him" is the place for the soul's outpouring, and blessed are they that know it and find it!

This blessed place "before God" *can be found in public prayer.* Solomon's prayer before God was offered in the midst of a great multitude. The priests stood in their places, and the Levites kept their due order. The people were gathered together, and all the armies of the tribes of Israel stood in the streets of the holy city when

Solomon bowed his knee and cried mightily unto his God. It is evident that he was enabled, that day, not to pray to please the people, nor that they might note his eloquent language and be gratified with the appropriate performance; but he was inspired to pray before the Lord.

Ah, brethren! those of us who have to conduct your devotions strive hard that we may be seen of God in secret when heard of men in public; and I am sure that we never pray so rightly or so usefully for you as when we only remember you in a very inferior sense, but seem to be surrounded as with a cloud, enclosed within the secret place of the Most High, even when we stand supplicating aloud for you in the public assembly of God's people. The same is true of each of you: it is wrong for you, in a prayer-meeting, to pray with a view to an individual of importance, or with the remembrance of those present whose respect you would like to obtain. The mercy-seat is no place for the exhibition of your abilities. More evil still is it to take the opportunity of making personal remarks about others. I have heard of oblique hints having been given in prayer. I am sorry to say that I have even heard of remarks which have been so directly critical and offensive, that one knew what the brother was at, and lamented it. Such a proceeding is altogether objectionable and irreverent. We do not even pray in prayer-meetings to correct doctrinal errors, nor to teach a body of divinity, nor to make remarks upon the errors of certain brethren, nor to impeach them before the Most High. These things should be earnest matters of supplication, but not of a sort of indirect preaching and scolding in prayer. It is conduct worthy of the accuser of the brethren to turn a prayer into an opportunity of finding fault with others. Our prayer must be "before God," or else it is not an acceptable prayer; and if eye and memory and thought can be shut to the presence of everybody else, except in that minor sense, in which we must remember them in sympathy, then it is in the presence of God that we truly pray; and that, I say, may be done in public, if grace be given. For this we have need to pray, "O Lord, open thou my lips; and my mouth shall shew forth thy praise."

But prayer before God can just as well—perhaps more readily—*be offered in private*, though I am not sure that it is not easily missed even there. You are in your room, where you are accustomed to pray. Do you not find yourself upon your knees repeating goodly words, while your heart is wandering? May you not confess that often the prayer, which has been a matter of habit, has been said as much before the walls of your room, or before the bedpost, as before God? You have not realized his presence: you have not spoken distinctly and directly to him. Although you have observed the Saviour's canon, and have shut to the door, and nobody else has been there, so that you have not prayed in the presence of others; yet you have mainly prayed in your own presence, and God has to your inmost soul been far away. It is poor work merely to talk piously to yourself. "I pour out my soul in me," says David. There is not much that comes of pouring your heart into your heart, praying your soul into your own soul: it is neither an emptying of self, nor a filling with God: it does but stir up what had been quite as well left as dregs at the bottom. Better far is the course

prescribed in that hallowed precept, "Ye people, pour out your heart before him:" turn them bottom upwards, let all run out before God, and so let room be left for something better and more divine. Pouring out your soul within yourself does not come to much; and yet often that is about what our prayer amounts to—a recapitulation of wants, without a grasp of divine supplies, a bemoaning of weakness without a reception of strength; a consciousness of nothingness, but not a plunging into all-sufficiency. Brethren, the main point of supplication is neither to pray in the presence of others, nor yet, first of all, in your own presence, but to present your prayer "before God."

Now, it is clear that this means that *the prayer is to be directed to God*. "Well," says one, "I know that." I know you do: and yet, my brother, you too often forget it. Like a playful boy, you get your bow and arrows and shoot them anywhere. The way to pray is to take in hand the aforesaid bow and arrows, and—you think I am going to say, shoot with them with all your might; but I am not in such haste. Wait a bit! Yes, draw the string, and fit the arrow to it, but wait, wait! Wait till you have your eye fixed on the target! Wait till you see distinctly the centre of the mark! What can be the use of shooting if you have not something to shoot at? Wait, then, till you know what you are going to do. You want to strike the white, to pierce the centre of the target. Be sure, then, that you get it well into your eye! Imitate David, who says, "In the morning will I direct my prayer unto thee, and will look up." He has fixed the arrow, drawn the bow, and taken deliberate aim, now is the time for the next act; he lets the arrow fly. How well directed! See! he has made a centre! He caught the mark with his eye, and therefore he has struck it with his arrow. Oh to pray with a distinct object! Indefinite praying is a waste of breath. It will never do to begin praying, neck or nothing, because the time has come for it. We must think, "I am about to ask of God what I want: I am to speak to the great King of kings, from whom all grace must come: it is to him that my prayer must be directed. What, then, shall I ask at his hands?" Does anybody here suppose that the repeating of certain words out of a book, or of his own making, has any virtue in it? Some seem, by their frequent repetitions of that blessed model of prayer, the Lord's Prayer, to think that there is a magical charm in that sacred arrangement of words; but, I tell you solemnly, you might as well repeat that perfect prayer backwards as forwards, if your heart is not in it. If your very heart is not in it, and if your soul is not looking Godwards, you profane your Lord's words, and are guilty of all the greater sin because of their excellence. Make not praying a piece of witchcraft, and your supplications an imitation of the *abracadabra* of the wizard; else it is vain superstition, and not acceptable supplication. Pray thou distinctly with all thy wits about thee *to thy God*. Speak thou to him.

And hence it becomes needful that *we should endeavour in prayer to realize the presence of God*. It shall be well put in this way: thou hast prayed well if thou hast spoken to God as a man speaketh to his friend. If thou art as sure that God is there as that thou art there, and perhaps somewhat more sure; if thou art in him, and he in thee,

and if thou talkest to him as to one whom thou canst not see, but whom thou canst perceive better than by sight, thou hast prayed well. If thou speakest to him as to one whom thou canst not feel with thy hand, but canst feel with all thy nature, with something better than fingers and hands, perceiving that he is, and knowing that he is hearing thee, and will reward thy diligent seeking, this is praying before God, pleading before a living God, with one who feels and will be moved by what *thou* feelest, to one who speaks, and will hearken to what thou speakest. Thou art to commune with one who is not like thy fellow-men, who may let thee plead and remain like a block, unmoved by thy pathetic requests; but to a living God, a tender God, sensitive to all the sensations of thy soul. Oh, to come before the living and acting God! Not before a God, lame and impotent; nor before the new God, who is impersonal and dead, but before the true God—God in Christ Jesus! If we did but realize who he is to whom we speak—God, very nigh to us in the person of the Only Begotten, who has taken our nature upon himself, what praying ours would be! And that is the right sort of praying. Oh, that the God of truth may be able, in speaking to each of us, to speak concerning, “Thy prayer and thy supplication which thou hast prayed before me”! Lord, help us to pass through the outer courts, and to enter into thy inner court and speak with thee. Lord, deliver us from staying in the words, but bring thou us into the spirit of prayer; bring thou us near thyself.

If there are any here that have never prayed, let their prayer at this time be to one who is close to them, ready to hear them. Do not ask, “What shall I say?” Say to God what you wish to say. What is your desire to-night? Would you be saved? Beg him to save you. Would you be forgiven? Ask forgiveness. “The words,” say you, “tell me the words.” Nay, you need no words. If you have none, look, look to him. Let your heart think out its desires. There is music without words: and there is prayer without words. The soul of prayer is being before God, and desiring before God, who hears without sounds, and understands without expressions. Open your heart; look to him; and ask him to read what you cannot read. Beg him of his great mercy to give you, not even according to your own sense of your requirements, but according to the riches of his mercy in Christ Jesus. You are praying before God when you have realized his presence. The Lord does not require from you that you should express yourself in words. He reads what is there with an omniscient glance, what is written on your heart. To know that he does so, and to plead in that spirit, is prayer before God.

II. I will change the run of our thought for a little while, to notice, with much earnestness, OUR GREAT DESIDERATUM IN PRAYER. It is that which God said that he had given to Solomon. “I have heard thy prayer and thy supplication.”

I have often had occasion to remark, that the wise men of modern times, whose principal characteristic is, that they think so much of themselves, and so very little of anybody else, tell us that prayer is an excellent exercise, good and comforting, and useful; but that we are not to suppose that it has any effect upon God whatever. We enquire

of them, "Would you have us go on praying after the information you have given?" "Oh, yes," they say, "Oh yes, of course it is a pious exercise, a proper and edifying thing. Go on praying, but do not think that God hears." Brethren, it is evident that they think us idiots. Evidently they consider praying men to be born fools. If it be certain that prayer has no effect upon God, my brother, I would just as lief whistle when I rise in the morning as pray, and I would as soon close my eyes at night in dumb silence as run over a set of ineffectual words. There could be no good in prayer if it should be proved that it never went beyond the room in which it was uttered. When it ceases to be accepted by the Lord, and honoured by his response, we shall abandon it, of course. If there is neither hearing, nor answering, we shall have reduced ourselves to the level of the worshippers of Baal, if we continue to cry; and we have not come to that yet. We are obliged to you wise men for your compliments; but we shall not follow your absurd advice! Your pretty praises of our devotion as a pleasing and instructive exercise are quite lost upon us, since they involve a covert insult. You may take back your compliments, if you please; for our opinion of your wisdom is almost equal to your opinion of ours.

But, brethren, what we desire in prayer is *really to be heard*. If I pray, I pray not to the winds, nor to the waves, but to God; and if he does not hear me, I have lost my breath.

The first thing the soul desires in prayer is *audience with God*. If the Lord do not hear us, we have gained nothing. And what an honour it is, if you come to think of it, to have audience with God! The frail, feeble, undeserving creature is permitted to stand in the august presence of the God of the whole earth, and the Lord regards that poor creature as if there were nothing else for him to observe, and bends his ear and his heart to listen to that creature's cry. It is necessary to a living prayer—to feel that we are speaking to God, and that God is hearing us.

You notice, that generally, in the Psalms, David says very little about God's answering; but he always speaks about God's hearing, and he asks that he would hear. That he should deign to hear us is quite enough, quite enough from such a God as he is. If I can get my petition placed in his hand, I am fully satisfied. If I can pour my desire into his ear, and he has once observed it, all further fear is removed. Your heavenly Father knoweth that you have need of these things, and you may rest perfectly content; for, in coming into his presence, you have done according to his command, and therefore his promise holds good to you. The first thing wanted, then, is that the Lord should hear.

But we want more than that: we want *that he should accept*. It were a painful thing to be permitted to speak to a great friend, and then for him to stand austere and stern, and say, "I have heard what you have to say. Go your way." We ask not this of God. We beg him kindly and graciously to accept our poor confessions, petitions, supplications, and adorations; and if he does but look and smile, if he does but say one word into our soul which implies, "I have accepted thy prayer," what a joy it is! To have brought an offering which the Lord has accepted, this is the sweetness and delight of supplication!

Still, there is a third thing which we want, which God gave to Solomon, and that was *an answer*. He asked the Lord to hallow the house, and the Lord did hallow the house. And as to you and me in prayer, while there are some things which we must always pray for with a great deal of diffidence, evermore saying emphatically, "Not as I will, but as thou wilt;" yet are there certain other boons which we are encouraged to pray for with importunity, being resolved to have them. Those are spiritual blessings, covenant blessings, distinctly promised, and evidently necessary: these we may ask for without any question, using a sacred importunity, and refusing to let the angel go unless he blesses us. On matters promised by God in his Word we may come again and again;—knocking at the Lord's door until he awakes and gives us the loaves that we seek for our hungry and fainting friend. Oh, for more holy boldness! Oh, for more assured confidence! We have need to believe that we have the petitions that we ask of him. We must ask in faith, nothing wavering, or we may not expect to receive anything of the Lord.

Oh, yes, we long to be heard and answered; and we cannot be satisfied to pray unless we perceive that prayer is effective in the courts above. That is our desideratum in prayer.

III. This makes me mention, thirdly, OUR ASSURANCE OF ANSWER TO PRAYER. Can we have an assurance that God has heard and answered prayer? Solomon had it. The Lord said unto him, "I have heard thy prayer and thy supplication, that thou hast made before me." Does the Lord ever say that to us? I think so. Let us consider how he does so.

I think that he says it to us very often *in our usual faith*. I hope that I speak for many of you when I say that we constantly pray believingly. It is habitual with me to expect God to answer me. I go to him very simply, and ask for what I want; and, if I did not have that which I humbly sought for, I should be greatly surprised. When I do have it, I reckon it as a matter of course, for the Lord has promised to answer prayer, and it is certain that he will keep his promise. I am speaking now about the daily mercies, and the daily trials, and the ordinary events of life: in these matters God is sure to answer prayer, and our faith, in its ordinary operation, is, to our hearts, the voice of God, saying, "I have heard thy prayer and thy supplication."

But sometimes you require *strong confidence*. You have to solicit some extraordinary blessing. You get to a place like that to which Jacob came, when common prayer was not sufficient. When Esau was coming to meet him with an armed force, he must have a night's prayer: he must gather up all his courage at Jabbok, he must wrestle with the angel and win the divine blessing. At such times, it is a stronger faith than usual, brought into exercise, by necessity, which assures the soul of the blessing. "According to thy faith be it unto thee." If we can trust God—for that is the thing—we shall have the thing we seek. Faith is not saying, "I know that I have it," when you really have it not. That would be telling yourself a lie. Here is a man who says, "Believe that you are sanctified, and you are in a moment sanctified." But you are not. You may believe a lie in

believing that, and be, perhaps, less sanctified than you were before you believed it, and ten times more proud, and thus far more under the influence of Satan. To believe in God that he will sanctify me, and that he is sanctifying me, is a very different thing from believing that I am already sanctified. I believe that God will supply my needs, but I do not believe that I have got the Bank of England in my pocket. If I did believe it, I should not find it there when I put my hand to feel for it. Faith is not believing fanatically, but believing the truth. There is a wonderful difference between believing what your fancy says, and believing what God has distinctly promised. Faith and fancy are two very different things. God keep us from the falsehood of folly, and lead us into the truth of wisdom! I will believe anything, however monstrous it may appear, if God says it. I will believe nothing, however desirable, merely because my own fancy imagines it, or because your heated brain suggests it. Strong faith often brings with it a conviction within the soul which nothing can shake; a conviction most sure, and yet most reasonable, since it is inspired by the Spirit of God who bears witness only to the truth, and not to dreams. To the man's inner consciousness it is as though he heard the voice of God, saying, "I have heard thy prayer and thy supplication."

Sometimes this comes in the form of *a comfortable persuasion*. Have you never known what it is to leave off prayer when you are in the middle of it, and say, "I am heard: I am heard"? Have you not felt that you needed not to cry any longer, for you had gained your suit, and must rather begin to praise than continue to pray? When a man goes to a bank with a cheque, and he gets the money, he does not stand loafing about the counter: he goes off about his business. And oftentimes before God, he that is prepared to be a long time in prayer if it should be necessary, feels that he must be brief in petition and long in thanksgiving. He rises from his knees with the persuasion, "I need not ask any more: I am heard;" and he goes about his business, to do something more needful and seasonable than praying; for it is always better to serve God in a pressing practical duty than it is to continue to pray when prayer has no longer any reasonableness in it, seeing that you are already heard. If God has given you the blessing, why ask for it any further? "The Lord says to Moses, Wherefore criest thou unto me? speak unto the children of Israel, that they go forward;" and that going forward was a better thing than praying, now that praying had had its day. So there comes a comfortable assurance at times that it is even so, and you go your way rejoicing. This inward persuasion is no fanatical imagining, nor excitement of the brain, but a work of the Holy Spirit, which none can imitate, and only the receiver can understand.

The Lord also gives to his people *a manifest preparation for the blessing*. He prepares them to receive it. Their expectation is raised, so that they begin to look out for the blessing, and make room for it; and when it is so, you may be sure that it is coming. God never brought you to a well, and put a bucket and rope in your way, without intending to fill that bucket when you let it down. When the thirsty soil has opened all its mouths to drink in the rain of heaven,

that rain always comes. When the ears of wheat are ready for the sun to ripen them, the heat of harvest is near. When a man of God so looks for the wind of the Spirit that he spreads the sails of hope, the breeze is sure to blow. Brother, it is want of preparation in you that hinders the blessing. "He did not many mighty works there because of their unbelief." "Ye are not straitened in us, but ye are straitened in your own bowels." But when the Lord has given you an evident preparation for the blessing, the blessing is already on the way, the shadow of it is resting upon you. In that preparation the Lord virtually says: "I have heard thy prayer and thy supplication."

*Actual observation* also breeds in us a solid confidence that our suit is succeeding. Sometimes God gives us an assurance that he has heard our prayer when he makes us look back and observe the past. How he has answered us! He changes not; he hears us still. O sirs, I have no patience with those who say that God does not hear prayer, for my daily experience proves the fact. I would not lie even under the notion of honouring God; but I will speak what I know. Throughout life it has been my habit to wait upon God about many things, and especially about extraordinary necessities which have arisen out of the demands of the great institutions committed to me. I shall not stay to tell the stories of the Lord's supplies in answer to prayer. Some of you know them in a measure; but, in very truth, the Lord has heard my prayers as distinctly as if he had rent the heavens, and put out his right hand filled with good. Many of you could bear similar witness, could you not? The fact that the Lord has heard us in the past speaks in our souls, and fills us with the assurance that he will hear us yet again. Memory emphasizes the voice of the Lord, which saith, "I have heard thy prayer; I have heard thy supplication, therefore trust me with all thine heart. Have I not always heard thy prayer? When did I refuse thee? My beloved one, when did I reject thee? Have I not always hearkened to thee? In the hour of thy distress, have I not delivered thee? In the times of thy need, have I not supplied thee? I have heard thy prayer. Go in peace. Weep no more. Let not thy soul be troubled. All is well, for I am on the throne of grace, and my face is towards thee."

IV. Now I have come to the end of what I had to say, with this one sole exception. Let me speak of OUR SPECIAL APPLICATION OF PRAYER. In the case of Solomon prayer turned in one direction, and in that direction I want to turn it now. You learn what Solomon's prayer was when you hear how God fulfilled it. God said to him, "I have hallowed this house which thou hast built, and put my name there for ever, and mine eyes and my heart shall be there perpetually." Last night the members of this church met in their annual church meeting,\* and we had great joy and thankfulness for all the mercy which God has made to pass before us. I have just completed thirty-three years of ministry here—the third of a century—with unbroken blessing. We can say that all these years have passed with no

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\* Feb. 9, 1887. Add two years of mercy to the record, and the same reflections will hold good. Oh, that we may now receive a second blessing, and learn how opportune is the subject to the occasion of the pastor's anticipated return to a renewed period of personal ministry!

division and no strife among us, with nothing but perpetual benedictions from the Lord God of our salvation. Blessed be his name!

Our prayer is again that the Lord himself would *hallow this house* which we have built. We ask this in no superstitious way. Bricks and mortar and iron and stone are nothing to us. The qualities of holiness do not adhere to material substances, but to hearts and to souls and acts; yet we ask our Lord to hallow this Tabernacle with his presence still more and more. If that were gone, Ichabod would be our bitter cry! The glory would indeed have departed. We want our Lord to hallow it by his favourable regard, that when we worship he will accept our worship, and hear our prayers and our praises. We want him to hallow it by his working among us in many more conversions. It was a joyous time to me when I saw the enquirer come who was number ten thousand: that is long ago, and we have reached a far higher number now, but all is the work of our gracious God. We shall never bring in another true convert unless we have God's presence! O Lord Jesus, we would constrain thee saying, "Abide with us." The Lord bless his people in this house of prayer in the breaking of bread, in the ordinance of baptism, in the proclamation of the gospel, and in all their gatherings together. O Lord, we pray thee hallow this house. We do pray it from our inmost souls. You that have found our services to be hallowed to you in days that are past cannot bear the idea of failure and famine in the future. May the Lord say to us to-night, "I have hallowed this house which thou hast built."

We want that he should hallow it next in this way: "*to put my name there for ever.*" "For ever." As long as there shall be any such house, or need of such a house, may his name be here. My venerable predecessor, Dr. Rippon, whom I never saw, I have been informed, was wont to pray for a certain successor of his whom he seemed always to have in his mind's thoughts. He frequently prayed for the man whom the Lord would send among the people of his care after his own decease. In a letter that I have seen, which he wrote to a friend, I cannot but somehow see myself; as in the glimmer of the firelight he saw the person who would follow him, and carry on his work. After sixty years of service in this church, as the old man grew older, he used to be praying about this successor more and more. I think that I may begin to pray after his example, that as long as there shall be the need for a house of God, the name of God may be honoured in this Tabernacle, and may faithful men proclaim his salvation in the power of the Holy Ghost. Shall there stand here one day a man that denies the Deity of my Lord? God forbid! ["Amen."] Shall there be found here one that shall preach modern thought, and give up the old, old gospel? God forbid! ["Amen."] Let the house be wrapped in flames, and every ash be blown away by the winds, sooner than that any shall preach from this pulpit any other gospel than that ye have received. ["Amen." "Amen."] I thank you for those loud Amens. May God himself say, Amen. May the name of our covenant God be set here for ever, and no other name.

And, then, Solomon prayed also, and God heard him, that *the eye of the Lord might be there.* That was Solomon's prayer, and God greatly

improved upon it, for he said that his eye *and his heart* should be there perpetually. Thus the Lord hears our prayers in a better sense than that in which we offer them. We pray that his eye may be upon us, and he adds, "It shall be so, and with my eye my heart also shall be there." Oh, that the eye of the Lord might be upon this house, and upon this church, to watch over it, to keep it from all harm! But may his heart also be with us, to fill us with his divine life and love, and to make us know his inner self! Oh for the love of God to be shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost! May we know that God's feelings of affection and delight are towards us! This shall be our joy unspeakable.

Now, brothers and sisters, who happen to be worshipping with us on this occasion, but are not members with us, I entreat you kindly to pray for this house and this church. I would, in return, pray for your place of worship, and for the church to which you belong. You will, however, readily forgive us if we think, just now, after our thirty-three years, of this particular church and its interests. We must praise the Lord for all his mercy towards us. Grace personally received must be personally acknowledged. You see, we are at home, and we must think of our own home. I can truly sing,

"Here my best friends, my kindred dwell,  
Here God my Saviour reigns."

"I dwell among my own people," said the Shunammite; and there is no joy like it for a Christian minister and a Christian church member—to feel that he dwells among his own people, and is happy with them. To be driven from church to church, as some are, is a wretched business. To be like others, changing their views as often as the moon; happy nowhere, miserable everywhere, agreeing with nobody, not even with themselves, is a poor business. Persons of that kind, I hope, will not join this church just yet, or, if they do, may the Lord convert them as they come in. As for us, we love each other, and our united prayer is that the eye and the heart of God may be with us and all his people perpetually. The Lord bless you, dear friends, for Christ's sake! Amen.

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PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—1 Kings iii. 5-15; ix. 1-9.

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#### LETTER FROM MR. SPURGEON.

KIND FRIENDS,—My injuries are far greater than I supposed. It will take some time before foot, mouth, head, and nerves can be right again. What a mercy that I was not smashed quite up! The angels did their work well, for another stone would have brought me to mine end.

Through what a stupor I have passed! Yet in a day or two I shall be none the worse. I am overcome with gratitude. May I be spared to keep my own footing to the end, and let the down-graders know how terrible is a fall from the high places of the Lord's truth!

Yours very truly,

Mentone, Jan. 12th, 1899.

C. H. SPURGEON.