

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

PRAYER CERTIFIED OF SUCCESS.

A Sermon

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“And I say unto you, Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.”—Luke xi. 9—10.

To seek aid in time of distress from a supernatural being is an instinct of human nature. We say not that human nature unrenewed ever offers truly spiritual prayer, or ever exercises saving faith in the living God; but still, like a child crying in the dark, with painful longing for help from somewhere or other, it scarce knows where, the soul in deep sorrow almost invariably cries to some supernatural being for succour. None have been more ready to pray in time of trouble than those who have ridiculed prayer in their prosperity; and probably no prayers have been more true to the feelings of the hour than those which atheists have offered under the pressure of the fear of death. In one of his papers in the *Tattler*, Addison describes a man, who, on board ship, loudly boasted of his atheism. A brisk gale springing up, he fell upon his knees and confessed to the chaplain that he had been an atheist. The common seamen who had never heard the word before, thought it had been some strange fish, but were more surprised when they saw it was a man, and learned out of his own mouth “that he never believed till that day that there was a God.” One of the old tars whispered to the boatswain, that it would be a good deed to heave him overboard, but this was a cruel suggestion, for the poor creature was already in misery enough—his atheism had evaporated, and he in mortal terror cried to God to have mercy upon him. Similar incidents have occurred, not once nor twice. Indeed, so frequently does boastful scepticism come down with a run at the last that we always expect it to do so. Take away unnatural restraint from the mind, and it may be said of all men that, like the comrades of Jonah, they cry every man unto his God in their trouble. As birds to their

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nests, and hinds to their coverts, so men in agony fly to a superior being for succour in the hour of need. God has given to all the creatures he has made some peculiar form of strength—one has such swiftness of foot that at the baying of a hound it escapes from danger by outstripping the wind; another, with outspread wing, is lifted beyond the fowler; a third with horns pushes down its enemy, and a fourth with tooth and claw tears in pieces its adversary. To man he gave but little strength compared with the animals among which he was placed in Eden, and yet he was king over all, because the Lord was his strength. So long as he knew where to look for the source of his power, man remained the unresisted monarch of all around him. That image of God in which he shone resplendent sustained his sovereignty over the fowls of the air, and the beasts of the field, and the fish of the sea. By instinct man turned to his God in Paradise; and now, though he is to a sad degree a discrowned monarch, there lingers in his memory shadows of what he was, and remembrances of where his strength must still be found. Therefore, no matter where you find a man, you meet one who in his distress will ask for supernatural help. I believe in the truthfulness of this instinct, and that man prays because there is something in prayer. As when the Creator gives his creature the power of thirst, it is because water exists to meet its thirst; and as when he creates hunger there is food to correspond to the appetite; so when he inclines men to pray it is because prayer has a corresponding blessing connected with it.

We find a powerful reason for expecting prayer to be effectual in the fact that it is an institution of God. In God's word we are over and over again commanded to pray. God's institutions are not folly. Can I believe that the infinitely wise God has ordained for me an exercise which is ineffectual, and is no more than child's play? Does he bid me pray, and yet has prayer no more result than if I whistled to the wind, or sang to a grove of trees? If there be no answer to prayer, prayer is a monstrous absurdity and God is the author of it; which it is blasphemy to assert. No man who is not a fool will continue to pray when you have once proved to him that prayer has no effect with God, and never receives an answer. Prayer is a work for idiots and madmen, and not for sane persons, if it be, indeed, true, that its effects end with the man who prays!

I shall not this morning enter into any arguments upon the matter; rather, I am coming to my text, which to me, at least, and to you who are followers of Christ, is the end of all controversy. Our Saviour knew right well that many difficulties would arise in connection with prayer which might tend to stagger his disciples, and therefore he has balanced every opposition by an overwhelming assurance. Read those words, "*I say unto you*," I—your Teacher, your Master, your Lord, your Saviour, your God: "*I say unto you*, Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you."

In the text our Lord meets all difficulties first by *giving us the weight of his own authority*, "*I say unto you*"; next by *presenting us with a promise*, "*Ask, and it shall be given you*," and so on; and then by *reminding us of an indisputable fact*, "*everyone that asketh*

receiveth." Here are three mortal wounds for a Christian's doubts as to prayer.

I. First, then, OUR SAVIOUR GIVES TO US THE WEIGHT OF HIS OWN AUTHORITY, "*I say unto you.*" The first mark of a follower of Christ is, that he believes his Lord. We do not follow the Lord at all if we raise any questions upon points whereupon he speaks positively. Though a doctrine should be surrounded with ten thousand difficulties, the *ipse dixit* of the Lord Jesus sweeps them all away, so far as true Christians are concerned. Our Master's declaration is all the argument we want, "I say unto you," is our logic. Reason! we see thee at thy best in Jesus, for he is made of God unto us wisdom. He cannot err, he cannot lie, and if he saith, "I say unto you," there is an end of all debate.

But, brethren, there are certain reasons which should lead us the more confidently to rest in our Master's word upon this point. There is power in every word of the Lord Jesus, but there is special force in the utterance before us. It has been objected to prayer that it is not possible that it should be answered, because the laws of nature are unalterable, and they must and will go on whether men pray or not. Not a drop of water will change its position in a single wave, or a particle of infectious matter be turned from its course, though all the saints in the universe should plead against tempest and plague. Now, concerning that matter, we are in no hurry to make answer; our adversaries have more to prove than we have, and among the rest they have to prove a negative. To us it does not seem needful to prove that the laws of nature are disturbed. God can work miracles, and he may work them yet again as he has done in days of yore, but it is no part of the Christian faith that God must needs work miracles in order to answer the prayers of his servants. When a man in order to fulfil a promise has to disarrange all his affairs, and, so to speak, to stop all his machinery, it proves that he is but a man, and that his wisdom and power are limited; but he is God indeed who, without reversing the engine, or removing a single cog from a wheel, fulfils the desires of his people as they come up before him. The Lord is so omnipotent that he can work results tantamount to miracles without in the slightest degree suspending any one of his laws. He did, as it were, in the olden times, stop the machinery of the universe to answer prayer, but now, with equally godlike glory, he orders events so as to answer believing prayers, and yet suspends no natural law.

But this is far from being our only or our main comfort; that lies in the fact that we hear the voice of one who is competent to speak upon the matter, and he says, "I say unto you, Ask and it shall be given you." Whether the laws of nature are reversible or irreversible, "Ask and it shall be given you; seek and ye shall find." Now, who is he that speaketh thus? It is he that made all things, without whom was not anything made that was made. Cannot he speak to this point. O thou eternal Word, thou who wast in the beginning with God, balancing the clouds and fastening the foundations of the earth, thou knowest what the laws and the unalterable constitutions of nature may be, and if thou sayest, "Ask and it shall be given you," then assuredly it will be so, be the laws of nature what they may. Besides, our Lord is by us adored as the sustainer of all things; and, seeing that all the laws of

nature are only operative through his power, and are sustained in their motion by his might, he must be cognizant of the motion of all the forces in the world; and if he says, "Ask and it shall be given you," he does not speak in ignorance, but knows what he affirms. We may be assured that there are no forces which can prevent the fulfilment of the Lord's own word. From the Creator and the Sustainer, the word "I say unto you," settles all controversy for ever.

But another objection has been raised which is very ancient indeed, and has a great appearance of force. It is raised not so much by sceptics, as by those who hold a part of the truth; it is this—that prayer can certainly produce no result, because the decrees of God have settled everything, and those decrees are immutable. Now we have no desire to deny the assertion that the decrees of God have settled all events. It is our full belief that God has foreknown and predestinated everything that happeneth in heaven above or in the earth beneath, and that the foreknown station of a reed by the river is as fixed as the station of a king, and "the chaff from the hand of the winnower is steered as the stars in their courses." Predestination embraceth the great and the little, and reacheth unto all things; the question is, wherefore pray? Might it not as logically be asked wherefore breathe, eat, move, or do anything? We have an answer which satisfies us, namely, that our prayers are in the predestination, and that God has as much ordained his people's prayers as anything else, and when we pray we are producing links in the chain of ordained facts. Destiny decrees that I should pray—I pray; destiny decrees that I shall be answered, and the answer comes to me. Moreover, in other matters we never regulate our actions by the unknown decrees of God; as for instance, a man never questions whether he shall eat or drink, because it may or may not be decreed that he shall eat or drink; a man never enquires whether he shall work or not on the ground that it is decreed how much he shall do or how little; as it is inconsistent with common sense to make the secret decrees of God a guide to us in our general conduct, so we feel it would be in reference to prayer, and therefore still we pray. But we have a better answer than all this. Our Lord Jesus Christ comes forward, and he says to us this morning, "My dear children, the decrees of God need not trouble you, there is nothing in them inconsistent with your prayers being heard. 'I say unto you, Ask, and it shall be given you.'" Now, who is he that says this? Why it is he that has been with the Father from the beginning—"the same was in the beginning with God"—and he knows what the purposes of the Father are and what the heart of God is, for he has told us in another place, "the Father himself loveth you." Now since he knows the decrees of the Father, and the heart of the Father, he can tell us with the absolute certainty of an eye-witness that there is nothing in the eternal purposes in conflict with this truth, that he that asketh receiveth, and he that seeketh findeth. He has read the decrees from beginning to end: hath he not taken the book, and loosed the seven seals thereof, and declared the ordinances of heaven? He tells you there is nothing there inconsistent with your bended knee and streaming eye, and with the Father's opening the windows of heaven to shower upon you the blessings which

you seek. Moreover, he is himself God : the purposes of heaven are his own purposes, and he who ordained the purpose here gives the assurance that there is nothing in it to prevent the efficacy of prayer. "I say unto you." O ye that believe in him, your doubts are scattered to the winds, ye know that he heareth prayer.

But sometimes there arises in our mind a third difficulty, which is associated with our own judgment of ourselves and our estimate of God. We feel that God is very great, and we tremble in the presence of his majesty ; we feel that we are very little, and that, in addition, we are also vile ; and it does seem a thing incredible that such guilty nothings should have power to move the arm which moves the world. I wonder not if that fear should often hamper us in prayer. But Jesus answers it so sweetly : he says—"I say unto you, Ask, and it shall be given you." And I ask again, who is it that says, "I say unto you" ? Why, it is he who knows both the greatness of God and the weakness of man. He is God, and out of the excellent Majesty I think I hear him say, "I say unto you, Ask, and it shall be given you." But he is also man like ourselves, and he says, "Dread not your littleness, for I, bone of your bone and flesh of your flesh, assure you that God heareth man's prayer." The words come to us with the harmony of blended notes ; the God, the man, both speak to us—"Dread not my majesty, your prayer is heard. Fear not your own weakness ; I as a man have been heard of God."

And yet, again, if the dread of sin should haunt us, and our own sorrow should depress us, I would remind you that Jesus Christ, when he says, "I say unto you," gives us the authority, not only of his person, but of his experience. Jesus was wont to pray. Never any prayed as he did. Nights were spent in prayer by him, and whole days in earnest intercession ; and he says to us, "I say unto you, Ask, and it shall be given you." I think I see him coming fresh from the heather of the hills, among which he had knelt all night to pray, and he says, "My disciples, Ask, and it shall be given you, for I have prayed, and it has been given unto me." I think I hear him say it, with his face all bloody red and his garments as if he had trodden the wine fat, as he rises from Gethsemane, with his soul exceeding sorrowful even unto death. He was heard in that he feared, and therefore he saith to us, "I say unto you, knock and it shall be opened unto you." Ay, and I think I hear him speak thus from the cross, with his face bright with the first beam of sunlight after he had borne our sins in his own body on the tree, and had suffered all our griefs to the last pang. He had cried, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me," and now, having received an answer, he cries in triumph, "It is finished," and, in so doing, bids us also "ask, and it shall be given us." Jesus has proved the power of prayer. Oh but, saith one, "he has not proved what it is to pray in trouble like mine." How grossly thou errest, the Saviour's trouble was worse than thine. There are no depths so deep that he has not dived to the bottom of them. Christ has prayed out of the lowest dungeon and out of the most horrible pit. "Ay, but he has not cried under the burden of sin." How canst thou speak so thoughtlessly ! Was ever such a burden of sin borne by any man as was laid on him ? True, the sins were not his own, but they

were sins, and sins with all their crushing weight in them too ; yet was he heard, and he was helped unto the end. Christ gives thee, in his own experience, the divinest proof that the asking shall be followed by the receiving, even when sin lieth at the door.

Thus much is certain, if you, who are believers, cannot believe in the efficacy of prayer on the very word of Christ, it has come to a strange pass ; for, O beloved, you are leaning all your soul's weight on Jesus. If he be not true, then are you trusting to a false Saviour. If he speak not verities, then you are deceived. If you can trust him with your soul, you must of necessity trust him with your prayers.

Remember, too, that if Jesus our Lord could speak so positively here, there is a yet greater reason for believing him now, for he has gone within the veil, he sits at the right hand of God, even the Father, and the voice does not come to us from the man of poverty, wearing a garment without seam, but from the enthroned priest with the golden girdle about his loins, for it is he who now saith, from the right hand of God : " I say unto you, Ask, and it shall be given you." Do you not believe in his name ? How then can a prayer that is sincerely offered in that name fall to the ground ? When you present your petition in Jesu's name, a part of his authority clothes your prayers. If your prayer be rejected, Christ is dishonoured : you cannot believe that. You have trusted him, then believe that prayer offered through him must and shall win the day.

We cannot tarry longer on this point, but we trust the Holy Spirit will impress it upon all our hearts.

II. We will now remember that OUR LORD PRESENTS US WITH A PROMISE.

Note that the promise is given to several varieties of prayer. " I say unto you, Ask, and it shall be given you ; seek, and ye shall find ; knock and it shall be opened unto you." The text clearly asserts that all forms of true prayer shall be heard, provided they be presented through Jesus Christ, and are for promised blessings. Some are vocal prayers, men *ask* ; never should we fail to offer up every day and continually the prayer which is uttered by the tongue, for the promise is that the asker shall be heard. But there are others who, not neglecting vocal prayer, are far more abundant in active prayer, for by humble and diligent use of the means they *seek* for the blessings which they need. Their heart speaks to God by its longings, strivings, emotions, and labours. Let them not cease seeking, for they shall surely find. There are others who, in their earnestness, combine the most eager forms, both acting and speaking, for *knocking* is a loud kind of asking, and a vehement form of seeking. If our prayer be vocal speech with God, or if it be the practical use of means ordained, which is real prayer, or if it should, best of all, be the continued use of both, or if it be expressed only by a tear or a sigh, or even if it remain quite unexpressed in a trembling desire, it shall be heard. All varieties of true prayer shall meet with responses from heaven.

Now observe that these varieties of prayer are put on an ascending scale. It is said first that we ask : I suppose that refers to the prayer which is a mere statement of our wants, in which we tell the Lord that we want this and that, and ask him to grant it to us. But

as we learn the art of prayer we go on further to seek : which signifies that we marshal our arguments, and plead reasons for the granting of our desires, and we begin to wrestle with God for the mercies needed. And if the blessing come not, we then rise to the third degree, which is knocking : we become importunate, we are not content with asking and giving reasons, but we throw the whole earnestness of our being into our requests, and practise the text which says "the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force." So the prayers grow from asking—which is the statement, to seeking—which is the pleading ; and to knocking—which is the importuning ; to each of these stages of prayer there is a distinct promise. He that asks shall have, what did he ask for more ? but he that seeks going further shall find, shall enjoy, shall grasp, shall know that he has obtained ; and he who knocks shall go further still, for he shall understand, and to him shall the precious thing be opened—he shall not merely have the blessing and enjoy it, but he shall comprehend it, shall "understand with all saints, what are the heights and depths." I want, however, you to notice this fact, which covers all—whatever form your prayer may assume it shall succeed. If you only ask you shall receive, if you seek you shall find, if you knock it shall be opened, but in each case according to your faith shall it be unto you. The clauses of the promise before us are not put as we say in law, jointly : he that asks and seeks and knocks shall receive, but they are put severally—he that asks shall have, he that seeks shall find, he that knocks shall have it opened. It is not when we combine the whole three that we get the blessing, though doubtless if we did combine them, we should get the combined reply ; but if we exercise only one of these three forms of prayer, we shall still get that which our souls seek after.

These three methods of prayer exercise a variety of our graces. It is a gloss of the fathers upon this passage that faith asks, hope seeks, and love knocks, and the gloss is worth repeating. Faith asks because she believes God will give ; hope having asked expects, and therefore seeks for the blessing ; love comes nearer still, and will not take a denial from God, but desireth to enter into his house, and to sup with him, and, therefore, knocks at his door till he opens. But, again, let us come back to the old point ; it matters not which grace is exercised ; a blessing comes to each one ; if faith asks it shall receive ; if hope seeks it shall find ; and if love knocks it shall be opened to her.

These three modes of prayer suit us in different stages of distress. There am I, a poor mendicant at mercy's door, I ask, and I shall receive : but I lose my way, so that I cannot find him of whom I once asked so successfully ; well then I may seek with the certainty that I shall find : and if I am in the last stage of all, not merely poor and bewildered, but so defiled as to feel shut out from God, like a leper shut out of the camp, then I may knock and the door will open to me.

Each one of these different descriptions of prayer is exceedingly simple. If anybody said "I cannot ask," our reply would be, you do not understand the word. Surely everybody can ask. A little child can ask. Long before an infant can speak it can ask—it need not use words in order to ask for what it wants, and there is not one among us

who is incapacitated from asking. Prayers need not be fine. I believe God abhors fine prayers. If a person asks charity of you in elegant sentences he is not likely to get it. Finery in dress or language is out of place in beggars. I heard a man in the street one day begging aloud by means of a magnificent oration. He used grand language in very pompous style, and I dare say he thought he was sure of getting piles of coppers by his borrowed speech, but I, for one, gave him nothing, but felt more inclined to laugh at his bombast. Is it not likely that many great prayers are about as useless? Many prayer meetings' prayers are a great deal too fine. Keep your figures and metaphors and parabolical expressions for your fellow-creatures, use them to those who want to be instructed, but do not parade them before God. When we pray, the simpler our prayers are the better; the plainest, humblest language which expresses our meaning is the best.

The next word is *seek*, and surely there is no difficulty about seeking? In finding there might be, but in seeking there is none. When the woman in the parable lost her money, she lit a candle and sought for it. I do not suppose she had ever been to the university, or qualified as a lady physician, or that she could have sat on the School Board as a woman of superior sense—but she could seek. Anybody who desires to do so can seek, be they man, woman, or child; and for their encouragement the promise is not given to some particular philosophical form of seeking, but “he that seeketh findeth.”

Then there is *knocking*: well, that is a thing of no great difficulty. We used to do it when we were boys, sometimes too much for the neighbours' comfort; and at home, if the knocker was a little too high, we had ways and means of knocking at the door even then; a stone would do it, or the heel of a boot, anything would make a knocking: it was not beyond our capacity by any means. Therefore, it is put in this fashion by Christ himself, as much as to tell us, “Ye need have no scholarship, no training, no talent, and no wit for prayer; ask, seek, knock, that is all, and the promise is to everyone of these ways of praying.”

Will you believe the promise? It is Christ who gives it. No lie ever fell from his lips. O doubt him not. Pray on if you have prayed, and if you have never prayed before, God help you to begin to-day!

III. Our third point is that JESUS TESTIFIES TO THE FACT THAT PRAYER IS HEARD. Having given a promise he then adds, in effect—“You may be quite sure that this promise will be fulfilled, not only because I say it, but because it is and always has been so.” When a man says the sun will rise to-morrow morning, we believe it because it always has risen. Our Lord tells us that, as a matter of indisputable fact, all along the ages true asking has been followed by receiving. Remember that he who stated this fact knew it. If you state a fact you may reply, “Yes, as far as your observation goes, it is true,” but the observation of Christ was unbounded. There was never a true prayer offered unknown to him. Prayers acceptable with the Most High come up to him by the way of the wounds of Christ. Hence the Lord Jesus Christ can speak by personal knowledge, and his declaration is that prayer has succeeded: “Everyone that asketh receiveth, and he that seeketh findeth.”

Now here we must, of course, suppose the limitations which would be made by ordinary common sense, and which are made by Scripture. It is not every one that frivolously or wickedly asks or pretends to ask of God that gets what he asks for. It is not every silly, idle, unconsidered request of unregenerate hearts that God will answer. By no manner of means—common sense limits the statement so far. Besides, Scripture limits it again, “Ye have not because ye ask not, or because ye ask amiss”—there is an asking amiss which will never obtain. If we ask that we may consume the good things upon our lust we shall not have them, or if we ask for that which would not be to our good we shall be heard by receiving no such answer as we desired. But those things being remembered, the statement of our Lord has no other qualification—“Every one that asketh receiveth.”

Let it be remembered that frequently even when the ungodly and the wicked have asked of God they have received. Full often in the time of their distress they have called upon God, and he has answered them. “Say you so?” saith one. Nay, I say not so, but so saith Scripture. Ahab’s prayer was answered, and the Lord said, “seest thou how Ahab humbleth himself before me? because he humbleth himself before me, I will not bring the evil in his days: but in his son’s days will I bring the evil upon his house.” So, also, the Lord heard the prayer of Jehoahaz, the son of Jehu, who did evil in the sight of the Lord. 2 Kings xiii. 1—4. The Israelites also, when for their sins they were given over to their foes, cried to God for deliverance, and they were answered, yet the Lord himself testified concerning them that they did but flatter with their mouth. Does this stagger you? Does he not hear the young ravens when they cry? Do you think he will not hear man, that is formed in his own image? Do you doubt it? Remember Nineveh. The prayers offered at Nineveh, were they spiritual prayers? Did you ever hear of a church of God in Nineveh? I have not, neither do I believe the Ninevites were ever visited by converting grace; but they were by the preaching of Jonah convinced that they were in danger from the great Jehovah, and they proclaimed a fast, and humbled themselves, and God heard their prayer, and Nineveh for a while was preserved. Many a time in the hour of sickness, and in the time of woe, God has heard the prayers of the unthankful and the evil. Dost thou think God gives nothing except to the good? Hast thou dwelt at the foot of Sinai and learned to judge according to the law of merit? What wast thou when thou didst begin to pray? Wert thou good and righteous? Has not God commanded thee to do good to the evil? Will he command thee to do what he will not do himself? Has he not said that he “sendeth rain upon the just and upon the unjust,” and is it not so? Is he not daily blessing those who curse him, and doing good to those who spitefully use him? This is one of the glories of God’s grace; and when there is nothing else good in the man, yet if there be a cry lifted up from his heart the Lord deigns full often to send relief from trouble. Now, if God has heard the prayers even of men who have not sought him in the highest manner, and has given them temporary deliverances in answer to their cries, will he not much more hear you when you are humbling yourself in his

sight, and desiring to be reconciled to him. Surely there is an argument here.

But to come more fully to the point with regard to real and spiritual prayers, everyone that asketh receiveth without any limit whatever. There has never been an instance yet of a man really seeking spiritual blessings of God without his receiving them. The publican stood afar off, and so broken was his heart that he dared not look up to heaven, yet God looked down on him. Manasseh lay in the low dungeon, he had been a cruel persecutor of the saints; there was nothing in him that could commend him to God; but God heard him out of the dungeon, and brought him forth to liberty of soul. Jonah had by his own sin brought himself into the whale's belly, and he was a petulant servant of God at the best, but out of the belly of hell he cried and God heard him. "Every one that asketh receiveth, and he that seeketh findeth, and to him that knocketh it shall be opened." *Every one.* If I wanted evidence I should be able to find it in this tabernacle. I would ask anyone here who has found Christ, to bear witness that God heard his prayer. I do not believe that among the damned in hell there is one who dare say "I sought the Lord and he rejected me." There shall not be found at the last day of account, one single soul that can say, "I knocked at mercy's door, but God refused to open it." There shall not stand before the great white throne, a single soul that can plead, "O Christ, I would have been saved by thee, but thou wouldst not save me. I gave myself up into thy hands, but thou didst reject me. I penitently asked for mercy of thee, but I had it not." Every one that asketh receiveth. It has been so until this day—it will be so till Christ himself shall come. If you doubt it try it, and if you have tried it try it again. Are you in rags?—that matters not, *every one* that asketh receiveth. Are you foul with sin?—that signifies not, "*every one* that seeketh findeth." Do you feel yourself as if you were shut out from God altogether?—that matters not either, "knock, and it *shall* be opened unto you, for *every one* that asketh receiveth." "Is there no election there?" Ay, ay, doubtless there is, but that does not alter this truth which has no limit to it whatsoever,—"*every one.*" What a rich text it is! "*Every one* that asketh receiveth."

When our Lord spake thus, he could have pointed to his own life as evidence; at any rate, we can refer to it now and show that no one asked of Christ who did not receive. The Syro-Phoenician woman was at first repulsed when the Lord called her a dog, but when she had the courage to say, "yet the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from the table," she soon discovered that everyone that asketh receiveth. She, also, who came behind him in the press and touched the hem of his garment, she was no asker, but she was a seeker, and she found.

I think I hear, in answer to all this, the lamentable wail of one who says, "I have been crying to God a long while for salvation; I have asked, I have sought, and I have knocked, but it has not come yet." Well, dear friend, if I be asked which is true, God or thou, I know which I shall stand by, and I would advise thee to believe God before thou believest thyself. God will hear prayer, but dost thou know there is one thing before prayer? What is it? Why, the gospel is not—he that prays shall be saved, that is not the gospel; I

believe he will be saved, but that is not the gospel I am told to preach to you. "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature; he"—what?—"he that believeth and is baptised shall be saved." Now, thou hast been asking God to save thee,—dost thou expect him to save thee without thy believing and being baptised? Surely thou hast not had the impudence to ask God to make void his own word! Might he not say to thee, "Do as I bid thee, believe my Son: he that believeth on Him hath everlasting life." Let me ask thee, dost thou believe Jesus Christ? Wilt thou trust him? "Oh, I trust him," saith one, "I trust him wholly." Soul, do not ask for salvation any more—you have it already—you are saved. If you trust Jesus with all your soul, your sins are forgiven you, and you are saved; and the next time you approach the Lord, go with praise as well as with prayer, and sing and bless his name. "But how am I to know that I am saved?" Saith one. God saith, "He that believeth and is baptised, shall be saved." Hast thou believed, hast thou been baptised? If so, thou art saved. How know I that? On the best evidence in all the world: God says thou art—dost thou want any evidence but that? "I want to feel this." Feel! Are thy feelings better than God's witness? Wilt thou make God a liar by asking more signs and tokens than his sure word of testimony? I have no evidence this day that I dare trust in concerning my salvation but this, that I rest on Christ alone with all my heart, and soul, and strength. "Other refuge have I none," and if thou hast that evidence it is all the evidence that thou needest seek for this day. Other witnesses of grace in thy heart shall come by and by, and cluster about thee, and adorn the doctrine thou dost profess, but now thy first business is to believe in Jesus.

"I have asked for faith," says one, "well, what dost thou mean by that? To believe in Jesus Christ is the gift of God, but it must be thine own act as well. Dost thou think God will believe for thee, or that the Holy Ghost believes instead of us? What has the Holy Spirit to believe? Thou must believe for thyself, or be lost. He cannot lie, wilt thou not believe in him? He deserves to be believed, trust in him, and thou art saved, and thy prayer is answered.

I think I hear another say, "I trust I am already saved; but I have been looking for the salvation of others in answer to my prayers;" Dear friend, you will get it. "He that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened." "But I have sought the conversion of such an one for years with many prayers." Thou shalt have it, or thou shalt know one day why thou hast it not, and shall be made content not to have it. Pray on in hope. Many a one has had his prayer for others answered after he has been dead. I think I have reminded you before of the father who had prayed for many years for his sons and daughters, and yet they were not converted, but all became exceedingly worldly. His time came to die. He gathered his children about his bed, hoping to bear such a witness for Christ at the last that it might be blessed to their conversion; but unhappily for him he was in deep distress of soul, he had doubts about his own interest in Christ. He was one of God's children who are put to bed in the dark; this being above all the worst fear of his

mind, that he feared his dear children would see his distress and be prejudiced against religion. The good man was buried and his sons came to the funeral, and God heard the man's prayer that very day, for as they went away from the grave one of them said to the other, "Brother, our father died a most unhappy death." "He did, brother; I was very much astonished at it, for I never knew a better man than our father." "Ah," said the first brother, "if a holy man such as our father found it a hard thing to die, it will be a dreadful thing for us who have no faith when our time comes." That same thought had struck them all, and drove them to the cross, and so the good man's prayer was heard in a mysterious manner. Heaven and earth shall pass away, but while God lives, prayer must be heard. While God remains true to his word, supplication is not in vain. The Lord give you grace to exercise it continually. Amen.

PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Luke xi. 1—13;
Psalm cvii. 1—31.

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