

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

THE IMPORTUNATE WIDOW.

A Sermon

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C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

“And he spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint; saying, There was in a city a judge, which feared not God, neither regarded man: and there was a widow in that city; and she came unto him, saying, *Avenge me of mine adversary.* And he would not for a while: but afterward he said within himself, *Though I fear not God, nor regard man; yet because this widow troubleth me, I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me.* And the Lord said, *Hear what the unjust judge saith. And shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them? I tell you that he will avenge them speedily.*”—Luke xviii. 1—8.

REMEMBER that our Lord did not only inculcate prayer with great earnestness, but he was himself a brilliant example of it. It always gives force to a teacher's words when his hearers well know that he carries out his own instructions. Jesus was a prophet mighty both in deed and in word, and we read of him, “Jesus began both to do and to teach.” In the exercise of prayer, “cold mountains and the midnight air” witnessed that he was as great a doer as a teacher. When he exhorted his disciples to continue in prayer, and to “pray without ceasing,” he only bade them follow in his steps. If any one of all the members of the mystical body might have been supposed to need no prayer, it would certainly have been our Covenant Head, but if our Head abounded in supplication, much more ought we, the inferior members. He was never defiled with the sins which have debased and weakened us spiritually; he had no inbred lusts to struggle with. But if the perfectly pure drew near so often unto God, how much more incessant in supplication ought we to be! So mighty, so great, and yet so prayerful! O ye weak ones of the flock, how forcibly does the lesson come home to you! Imagine, therefore, the discourse of this morning is not preached to you by me, but comes fresh from the lips of one who was the great master of secret prayer, the highest paragon and pattern of private supplication, and let every word have the force about it as coming from such a One.

Turn we at once to our text, and in it we shall notice, first, *the end*
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and design of the parable; secondly, we shall have some words to say upon *the two actors in it*, whose characters are intentionally so described as to give force to the reasoning; and then, thirdly, we shall dwell upon *the power which in the parable is represented as triumphant*.

I. First, then, consider OUR LORD'S DESIGN IN THIS PARABLE—"Men ought always to pray, and not to faint."

But can men pray always? There was a sect in the earlier days of Christianity who were foolish enough to read the passage literally, and to attempt praying without ceasing by continual repetition of prayers. They of course separated themselves from all worldly concerns, and in order to fulfil one duty of life neglected every other. Such madmen might well expect to reap the due reward of their follies. Happily there is no need in this age for us to reprobate such an error; there is far more necessity to cry out against those who, under the pretence of praying always, have no settled time for prayer at all, and so run to the opposite extreme. Our Lord meant by saying men ought always to pray, that *they ought to be always in the spirit of prayer*, always ready to pray. Like the old knights, always in warfare, not always on their steeds dashing forward with their lances in rest to unhorse an adversary, but always wearing their weapons where they could readily reach them, and always ready to encounter wounds or death for the sake of the cause which they championed. Those grim warriors often slept in their armour; so even when we sleep, we are still to be in the spirit of prayer, so that if perchance we wake in the night we may still be with God. Our soul, having received the divine centripetal influence which makes it seek its heavenly centre, should be evermore naturally rising towards God himself. Our heart is to be like those beacons and watch-towers which were prepared along the coast of England when the invasion of the Armada was hourly expected, not always blazing, but with the wood always dry, and the match always there, the whole pile being ready to blaze up at the appointed moment. Our souls should be in such a condition that ejaculatory prayer should be very frequent with us. No need to pause in business and leave the counter, and fall down upon the knees; the spirit should send up its silent, short, swift petitions to the throne of grace. When Nehemiah would ask a favour of the king, you will remember that he found an opportunity to do so through the king's asking him, "Why art thou sad?" but before he made him an answer he says, "I prayed unto the King of heaven;" instinctively perceiving the occasion, he did not leap forward to embrace it, but he halted just a moment to ask that he might be enabled to embrace it wisely and fulfil his great design therein. So you and I should often feel, "I cannot do this till I have asked a blessing on it." However impulsively I may spring forward to gain an advantage, yet my spirit, under the influence

of divine grace, should hesitate until it has said, "If thy Spirit go not with me, carry me not up hence." A Christian should carry the weapon of all-prayer like a drawn sword in his hand. We should never sheathe our supplications. Never may our hearts be like an unlimbered gun, with everything to be done to it before it can thunder on the foe, but it should be like a piece of cannon, loaded and primed, only requiring the fire that it may be discharged. The soul should be not always in the exercise of prayer, but always in the energy of prayer ; not always actually praying, but always intentionally praying.

Further, when our Lord says, men ought always to pray, he may also have meant that *the whole life of the Christian should be a life of devotion to God.*

"Prayer and praise, with sins forgiven,
Bring down to earth the bliss of heaven."

To praise God for mercies received both with our voices and with our actions, and then to pray to God for the mercies that we need, devoutly acknowledging that they come from him, these two exercises in one form or other should make up the sum total of human life. Our life psalm should be composed of alternating verses of praying and of praising until we get into the next world, where the prayer may cease, and praise may swallow up the whole of our immortality. "But," saith one, "we have our daily business to attend to." I know you have, but there is a way of making business a part of praise and prayer. You say, "Give us this day our daily bread," and that is a prayer as you utter it ; you go off to your work, and as you toil, if you do so in a devout spirit, you are actively praying the same prayer by your lawful labour. You praise God for the mercies received in your morning hymn ; and when you go into the duties of life, and there exhibit those graces which reflect honour upon God's name, you are continuing your praises in the best manner. Remember that with Christians to labour is to pray, and that there is much truth in the verse of Coleridge—

"He prayeth best who loveth best."

To desire my fellow creatures' good and to seek after it, to desire God's glory, and so to live as to promote it, is the truest of devotion. The devotion of the cloisters is by no means equal to that of the man who is engaged in the battle of life ; the devotion of the nunnery and the monastery is at best the heroism of a soldier who shuns the battle ; but the devotion of the man in business life, who turns all to the glory of God, is the courage of one who seeks the thickest of the fray, and there bears aloft the grand old standard of Jehovah-nissi. You need not be afraid that there is anything in any lawful calling that need make you desist from vital prayer ; but, oh ! if your calling is such that you cannot pray in it, you had better leave it. If it be a sinful calling, an unholy calling, of course, you cannot present that to God, but any of

the ordinary avocations of life are such that if you cannot sanctify them, it is a want of sanctity in yourself, and the fault lies with you. Men ought *always* to pray. It means that when they are using the lapstone, or the chisel, when the hands are on the plough handles, or on the spade, when they are measuring out the goods, when they are dealing in stocks, whatever they are doing, they are to turn all these things into a part of the sacred pursuit of God's glory. Their common garments are to be vestments, their meals are to be sacraments, their ordinary actions are to be sacrifices, and they themselves a royal priesthood, a peculiar people zealous for good works.

A third meaning which I think our Lord intended to convey to us was this: men ought always to pray, that is, *they should persevere in prayer*. This is probably his first meaning. When we ask God for a mercy once, we are not to consider that now we are not further to trouble him with it, but we are to come to him again and again. If we have asked of him seven times, we ought to continue until seventy times seven. In temporal mercies there may be a limit, and the Holy Ghost may bid us ask no more. Then must we say, the "Lord's will be done." If it be anything for our own personal advantage, we must let the Spirit of submission rule us, so that after having sought the Lord thrice, we shall be content with the promise, "My grace is sufficient for thee," and no longer ask that the thorn in the flesh should be removed. But in spiritual mercies, and especially in the united prayers of a church, there is no taking a denial. Here, if we would prevail, we must persist; we must continue incessantly and constantly, and know no pause to our prayer till we win the mercy to the fullest possible extent. "Men ought always to pray." Week by week, month by month, year by year; the conversion of that dear child is to be the father's main plea. The bringing in of that unconverted husband is to lie upon the wife's heart night and day till she gets it; she is not to take even ten or twenty years of unsuccessful prayer as a reason why she should cease; she is to set God no times nor seasons, but so long as there is life in her and life in the dear object of her solicitude, she is to continue still to plead with the mighty God of Jacob. The pastor is not to seek a blessing on his people occasionally, and then in receiving a measure of it to desist from further intercession, but he is to continue vehemently without pause, without restraining his energies, to cry aloud and spare not till the windows of heaven be opened and a blessing be given too large for him to house. But, brethren, how many times we ask of God, and have not because we do not wait long enough at the door! we knock a time or two at the gate of mercy, and as no friendly messenger opens the door, we go our ways. Too many prayers are like boys' runaway knocks, given, and then the giver is away before the door can be opened. O for grace to stand foot to foot with the

angel of God, and never, never, never relax our hold ; feeling that the cause we plead is one in which we must be successful, for souls depend on it, the glory of God is connected with it, the state of our fellow men is in jeopardy. If we could have given up in prayer our own lives and the lives of those dearest to us, yet the souls of men we *cannot* give up, we must urge and plead again and again until we obtain the answer.

“ The humble suppliant cannot fail
To have his wants supplied,
Since he for sinners intercedes
Who once for sinners died.”

I cannot leave this part of the subject without observing that our Lord would have us learn that *men should be more frequent in prayer*. Not only should they always have the spirit of prayer, and make their whole lives a prayer, and persevere in any one object which is dear to their souls, but there should be a greater frequency of prayer amongst all the saints. I gather that from the parable, “ lest by her continual coming she weary me.” Prayerfulness will scarcely be kept up long unless you set apart times and seasons for prayer. There are no times laid down in Scripture except by the example of holy men, for the Lord trusts much to the love of his people and to the spontaneous motions of the inner life. He does not say, “ Pray at seven o’clock in the morning every day,” or “ pray at night at eight, or nine, or ten, or eleven ;” but says, “ Pray without ceasing.” Yet every Christian will find it exceedingly useful to have his regular times for retirement, and I doubt whether any eminent piety can be maintained without these seasons being very carefully and scrupulously observed. We read in the old traditions of James the apostle, that he prayed so much that his knees grew hard through his long kneeling : and it is recorded by Fox, that Latimer, during the time of his imprisonment, was so much upon his knees that frequently the poor old man could not rise to his meals, and had to be lifted up by his servants. When he could no longer preach, and was immured within stone walls, his prayers went up to heaven for his country, and we in these times are receiving the blessing. Daniel prayed with his windows open daily and at regular intervals. “ Seven times a day,” saith one, “ will I praise thee.” David declared that at “ Evening, and morning, and at noon,” would he wait upon God. O that our intervals of prayer were not so distant one from the other ; would God that on the pilgrimage of life the wells at which we drink were more frequent. In this way should we continue in prayer.

Our Lord means, to sum up the whole, that *believers should exercise a universality of supplication*—we ought to pray at all times. There are no canonical hours in the Christian’s day or week. We should pray from

cockcrow to midnight, at such times as the Spirit moveth us. We should pray in all estates, in our poverty and in our wealth, in our health and in our sickness, in the bright days of festival and in the dark nights of lamentation. We should pray at the birth and pray at the funeral, we should pray when our soul is glad within us by reason of abundant mercy, and we should pray when our soul draweth nigh unto the gates of death by reason of heaviness. We should pray in all transactions, whether secular or religious. Prayer should sanctify everything. The word of God and prayer should come in over and above the common things of daily life. Pray over a bargain, pray over going into the shop and coming out again. Remember in the days of Joshua how the Gibeonites deceived Israel because Israel enquired not of the Lord, and be not thou deceived by a specious temptation, as thou mayst well be if thou dost not daily come to the Lord, and say, "Guide me: make straight a plain path for my feet, and lead me in the way everlasting." Thou shalt never err by praying too much, thou shalt never make a mistake by asking God's guidance too often; but thou shalt find this to be the gracious illumination of thine eyes, if in the turning of the road where two paths meet which seem to be equally right, thou shalt stay a moment and cry unto God, "Guide me, O thou great Jehovah." "Men ought always to pray." I have enlarged upon it from this pulpit, go you and expound it in your daily lives.

II. In enforcing this precept, our Lord gives us a parable in which there are TWO ACTORS, the characteristics of the two actors being such as to add strength to his precept.

In the first verse of the parable there is *a judge*. Now, herein is the great advantage to us in prayer. Brethren, if this poor woman prevailed with a judge whose office is stern, unbending, untender, how much more ought you and I to be instant in prayer and hopeful of success when we have to supplicate a Father! Far other is a father than a judge. The judge must necessarily be impartial, stern, but the father is necessarily partial to his child, compassionate and tender to his own offspring. Doth she prevail over a judge; and shall not we prevail with our Father who is in heaven? And doth she continue in her desperate need to weary him until she wins what she desires; and shall not we continue in the agony of our desires until we get from our heavenly Father whatsoever his word hath promised?

In addition to being a judge, he was *devoid of all good character*. In both branches he failed. He "feared not God." Conscience was seared in him, he had no thoughts of the great judgment-seat before which judges must appear. Though possibly he had taken an oath before God to judge impartially, yet he forgot his oath, and trod justice under his foot. "Neither did he regard man." The approbation of his fellow creatures, which is very often a power, even with naturally bad

men, either to restrain them from overt evil, or else to constrain them to righteousness, this principle had no effect upon him. Now, if the widow prevailed over such a wretch as this, if the iron of her importunity broke the iron and steel of this man's obduracy, how much more may we expect to be successful with him who is righteous, and just, and good, the Friend of the needy, the Father of the fatherless, and the Avenger of all such as are oppressed ! O let the character of God as it rises before you in all its majesty of truthfulness and faithfulness, blended with lovingkindness, and tenderness, and mercy, excite in you an indefatigable ardour of supplication, making you resolve with this poor woman that you will never cease to supplicate until you win your suit.

The judge was a man so unutterably bad, that he *even confessed his badness to himself*, with great contentment too. Without the slightest tinge of remorse, he said within himself, " Though I fear not God, neither regard man." There are few sinners who will go this length. They may neither fear God nor regard men, yet still they will indulge in their minds some semblance of that which is virtuous, and cheat themselves into the belief that at least they are not worse than others. But with this man there was no self-deception. He was as cool about this avowal as the Pharisee was concerning the opposite, " God, I thank thee that I am not as other men are." To what a brazen impertinence must this man have come, to what an extent must he have hardened his mind, that knowing himself to be such, he yet climbed the judgment-seat, and sat there to judge his fellow men ! Yet the woman prevailed with this monster in human form, who had come to take pleasure in his own wickedness, and gloated in the badness of his own heart. Over this man importunity prevailed—how much more over him who spared not his own Son, but freely delivered him up for us all ; how much more over him whose name is love, whose nature is everything that is attractive and encouraging to such as seek his face ! The worse this judge appears, and he could scarcely have been painted in blacker colours, the more does the voice of the Saviour seem to say to us, " Men ought always to pray, and not to faint."

Note with regard to the character of this judge, that he was one who *consciously cared for nothing but his own ease*. When at last he consented to do justice, the only motive which moved him, was, " lest by her continual coming she weary me. " *She stun me*," might be the Greek word—a kind of slang, I suppose, of that period, meaning lest " she batter me," " she bruise me," and as some translate it, " black my face with her incessant constant batterings." That was the kind of language he used ; a short quick sentence of indignation at being bothered, as we should say, by such a case as this. The only thing that moved him was a desire to be at ease, and to take things comfortably. O

brethren, if she could prevail over such a one, how much more shall we speed with God whose delight it is to take care of his children, who loves them even as the apple of his eye!

This judge was *practically unkind and cruel* to her; yet the widow continued. For awhile he would not listen to her, though her household, her life, her children's comfort, were all hanging upon his will; he left her by a passive injustice to suffer still. But our God has been practically kind and gracious to us, up to this moment he has heard us and granted our requests. Set this against the character of the judge, and surely every loving heart that knows the power of prayer will be moved to incessant importunity.

We must, however, pass on now to notice the other actor in the scene—the *widow*; and here everything tells again the same way, to induce the church of God to be importunate. She was apparently *a perfect stranger to the judge*. She appeared before him as an individual in whom he took no interest. He had possibly never seen her before; who she was and what she wanted was no concern to him. But when the church appears before God she comes as Christ's own bride, she appears before the Father as one whom he has loved with an everlasting love. And shall he not avenge his own elect, his own chosen, his own people? Shall not their prayers prevail with him, when a stranger's importunity won a suit of an unwilling judge?

The widow appeared at the judgment-seat *without a friend*. According to the parable, she had no advocate, no powerful pleader to stand up in the court and say, "I am the patron of this humble woman." If she prevailed, she must prevail by her own ardour and her own intensity of purpose. But when you and I come before our Father, we come not alone, for—

"He is at the Father's side,
The Man of love, the Crucified."

We have a Friend who ever liveth to make intercession for us. O Christian, urge thy suit with holy boldness, press thy case, for the blood of Jesus speaks with a voice that must be heard. Be not thou therefore faint in thy spirit, but continue instant in thy supplication.

This poor woman came *without a promise to encourage her*, nay, with the reverse, with much to discourage; but when you and I come before God, we are commanded to pray by God himself, and we are promised that if we ask it shall be given us, if we seek we shall find. Does she win without the sacred weapon of the promise, and shall not we win who can set the battering-rams of God's own word against the gates of heaven, a battering-ram that shall make every timber in those gates to quiver? O brethren, we must not pause nor cease a moment while we have God's promise to back our plea.

The widow, in addition to having no promise whatever, was even *without the right of constant access*. She had, I suppose, a right to clamour to be heard at ordinary times when judgment was administered, but what right had she to dog the judge's footsteps, to waylay him in the streets, to hammer at his private door, to be heard calling at nightfall, so that he, sleeping at the top of his house, was awakened by her cries? She had no permission so to importune, but we may come to God at all times and all seasons. We may cry day and night unto him, for he has bidden us pray without ceasing. What, without a permit is this woman so incessant! and with the sacred permissions which God has given us, and the encouragement of abounding lovingkindness, shall we cease to plead?

She, poor soul, every time she prayed, *provoked the judge*; lines of anger were on his face. I doubt not he foamed at the mouth to think he should be wearied by a person so insignificant; but with Jesus, every time we plead we please him rather than provoke him. The prayers of the saints are the music of God's ears.

"To him there's music in a groan,
And beauty in a tear."

We, speaking after the manner of men, bring a gratification to God when we intercede with him. He is vexed with us if we restrain our supplications; he is pleased with us when we draw near constantly. Oh, then, as you see the smile upon the Father's face, children of his love, I beseech you faint not, but continue still without ceasing to entreat the blessing.

Once more, this woman had a suit in which *the judge could not be himself personally interested*; but ours is a case in which the God we plead with is more interested than we are; for when a church asks for the conversion of souls, she may justly say, "Arise, O God, plead thine own cause." It is for the honour of Christ that souls should be converted; it brings glory to the mercy and power of God when great sinners are turned from the error of their ways; consequently we are pleading for the Judge with the Judge, for God we are pleading with God. Our prayer is virtually *for Christ as through Christ*, that his kingdom may come, and his will may be done.

I must not forget to mention that in this woman's case *she was only one*. She prevailed though she was only one, but shall not God avenge his own elect, who are not *one*, but tens of thousands? If there be a promise that if two or three are agreed it shall be done, how much more if in any church hundreds meet together with unanimous souls anxiously desiring that God would fulfil his promise? These pleas cast chains around the throne of God! How do they, as it were, hem in omnipotence! How they constrain the Almighty to arise out of his place and

come in answer to his people, and do the great deed which shall bless his church and glorify himself.

You see, then, whether we consider the judge, or consider the widow, each character has points about it which tend to make us see our duty and our privilege to pray without ceasing.

III. The third and last point: THE POWER WHICH, ACCORDING TO THIS PARABLE, TRIUMPHED.

This power was not the woman's eloquence, "I pray thee avenge me of mine adversary." These words are very few. They have the merit of being very expressive, but he that would study oratory will not gather many lessons from them. "I pray thee avenge me of mine adversary." Just eight words. You observe there is no plea, there is nothing about her widowhood, nothing urged about her children, nothing said about the wickedness of her adversary, nothing concerning the judgment of God upon unjust judges, nor about the wrath of God upon unjust men, who devour widows' houses—nothing of the kind. "I pray thee avenge me of mine adversary." Her success, therefore, did not depend upon her power in rhetoric, and we learn from this that the prevalence of a soul or of a church with God does not rest upon the elocution of its words, or upon the eloquence of its language. The prayer which mounts to heaven may have but very few of the tail feathers of adornment about it, but it must have the strong wing feathers of intense desire; it must not be as the peacock, gorgeous for beauty, but it must be as the eagle, for soaring aloft, if it would ascend up to the seventh heavens. When you pray in public, as a rule the shorter the better. Words are cumbersome to prayer. It often happens that an abundance of words reveals a scarcity of desires. Verbiage is generally nothing better in prayer than a miserable fig leaf with which to cover the nakedness of an unawakened soul.

Another thing is quite certain, namely, that the woman *did not prevail through the merits of her case*. It may have been a very good case, there is nothing said about that. I do not doubt the rightness of it; but still, the judge did not know nor care whether it was right or wrong; all he cared about was, this woman troubled him. He does not say, "She has a good case, and I ought to listen to it." No, he was too bad a man to be moved by such a motive—but "she worries me," that is all, "I will attend to it." So in our suit—in the suit of a sinner with God, it is not the merit of his case that can ever prevail with God. Thou hast no merit. If thou art to win, another's merit must stand instead of thine, and on thy part it must not be merit but misery; it must not be thy righteousness but thy importunity that is to prevail with God. How this ought to encourage those of you who are labouring under a sense of unworthiness! However unworthy you may be, continue in prayer. Black may be the hand, but if it can but lift

the knocker, the gate will open. Ay, though thou have a palsy in that hand; though, in addition to that palsy, thou be leprous, and the white leprosy be on thy forehead, yet if thou canst but tremblingly lift up that knocker and let it fall by its own weight upon that sacred promise, thou shalt surely get an audience with the King of kings. It is not eloquence, it is not merit, that wins with God, it is nothing but importunity.

Note with regard to this woman, that the judge said first, she troubled him, next he said, she came continually, and then he added his fear lest "she weary me." I think the case was somewhat after this fashion. The judge was sitting one morning on his bench, and many were the persons coming before him asking justice, which he was dealing out with the impartiality of a villain, giving always his best word to him who brought the heaviest bribes; when presently a poor woman uttered her plaint. She had tried to be heard several times, but her voice had been drowned by others, but this time it was more shrill and sharp, and she caught the judge's eye. "My lord, avenge me of mine adversary." He no sooner sees from her poverty-stricken dress that there are no bribes to be had, than he replies, "Hold your tongue! I have other business to attend to." He goes on with another suit in which the fees were more attractive. Still he hears the cry again, "My lord, I am a widow, avenge me of mine adversary." Vexed with the renewed disturbance, he bade the usher put her out, because she interrupted the silence of the court and stopped the public business. "Take care she does not get in again to-morrow," said he, "she is a troublesome woman." Long ere the morrow had come, he found out the truth of his opinion. She waited till he left the court, dogged his footsteps, and followed him through the streets, until he was glad to get through his door, and bade the servants fasten it lest that noisy widow should come in, for she had constantly assailed him with the cry, "Avenge me of mine adversary." He is now safely within doors, and bids the servants bring in his meal. They are pouring water on his hands and feet, his lordship is about to enjoy his repast, when a heavy knock is heard at the door, followed by a clamour, pushing, and a scuffle. "What is it?" saith he. "It is a woman outside, a widow woman, who wants your lordship to see justice done her." "Tell her I cannot attend to her, she must be gone." He seeks his rest at nightfall on the housetop, when he hears a heavy knock at the door, and a voice comes up from the street beneath his residence, "My lord, avenge me of mine adversary." The next morning his court is open, and, though she is forbidden to enter, like a dog that will enter somehow, she finds her way in, and she interrupts the court continually with her plea, "My lord, avenge me of mine adversary." Ask her why she is thus importunate, and she will tell you her husband is dead, and he

left a little plot of land—it was all they had, and a cruel neighbour who looked with greedy eyes upon that little plot, has taken it as Ahab took Naboth's vineyard, and now she is without any meal or any oil for the little ones, and they are crying for food. Oh, if their father had been alive, how he would have guarded their interests! but she has no helper, and the case is a glaring one; and what is a judge for if he is not to protect the injured? She has no other chance, for the creditor is about to take away her children to sell them into bondage. She cannot bear that. "No," she says, "I have but one chance; it is that this man should speak up for me and do me justice, and I have made up my mind he shall never rest till he does so. I am resolved that if I perish, the last words on my lips shall be, 'Avenge me of mine adversary.'" So the court is continually interrupted. Again the judge shouts, "Put her out; put her out! I cannot conduct the business at all with this crazy woman here continually dinning in my ears a shriek of 'Avenge me of mine adversary.'" But it is sooner said than done. She lays hold of the pillars of the court so as not to be dragged out, and when at last they get her in the street, she does but wait her chance to enter again, she pursues the judge along the highways, she never lets him have a minute's peace. "Well," says the judge, "I am worried out of my very life. I care not for the widow, nor her property, nor her children; let them starve, what are they to me? but I cannot stand this, it will weary me beyond measure. I will see to it." It is done, and she goes her way. Nothing but her importunity prevails.

Now, brethren, you have many other weapons to use with God in prayer, but our Saviour bids you not neglect this master, all-conquering, instrument of importunity. God will be more easily moved than this unjust judge, only be you as importunate as this widow was. If you are sure it is a right thing for which you are asking, plead now, plead at noon, plead at night, plead on; with cries and tears spread out your case, order your arguments, back up your pleas with reasons, urge the precious blood of Jesus, set the wounds of Christ before the Father's eyes, bring out the atoning sacrifice, point to Calvary, enlist the crowned Prince, the Priest who stands at the right hand of God; and resolve in your very soul that if Zion do not flourish, if souls be not saved, if your family be not blessed, if your own zeal be not revived, yet you will die with the plea upon your lips, and with the importunate wish upon your spirits. Let me tell you that if any of you should die with your prayers unanswered, you need not conclude that God has disappointed you. With one story I will finish. I have heard that a certain godly father had the unhappiness to be the parent of some five or six most graceless sons. All of them as they grew up imbibed infidel sentiments, and led a libidinous life. The father who had been constantly praying for them,

and was a pattern of every virtue, hoped at least that in his death he might be able to say a word that should move their hearts. He gathered them to his bedside, but his unhappiness in dying was extreme, for he lost the light of God's countenance, and was beset with doubts and fears, and the last black thought that haunted him was, "Instead of my death being a testimony for God, which will win my dear sons, I die in such darkness and gloom that I fear I shall confirm them in their infidelity, and lead them to think that there is nothing in Christianity at all." The effect was the reverse. The sons came round the grave at the funeral, and when they returned to the house, the eldest son thus addressed his brothers:—"My brothers, throughout his lifetime, our father often spoke to us about religion, and we have always despised it, but what a sermon his deathbed has been to us! for if he who served God so well and lived so near to God found it so hard a thing to die, what kind of death may we expect ours to be who have lived without God and without hope?" The same feeling possessed them all, and thus the father's death had strangely answered the prayers of his life through the grace of God. You cannot tell but what, when you are in glory, you should look down from the windows of heaven and receive a double heaven in beholding your dear sons and daughters converted by the words you left behind. I do not say this to make you cease pleading for their immediate conversion, but to encourage you. Never give up prayer, never be tempted to cease from it. So long as there is breath in your body, and breath in their bodies, continue still to pray, for I tell you that he will avenge you speedily though he bear long with you. God bless these words for Jesus' sake. Amen.
