

# Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

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THOUGHT-READING EXTRAORDINARY.

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## A Sermon

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“LORD, thou hast heard the desire of the humble: thou wilt prepare their heart, thou wilt cause thine ear to hear.”—Psalm x. 17.

NOTICE at the outset the logic of this verse. It is very simple, very forcible, very accurate logic. It runs thus: “Thou hast,” “thou wilt.” “Lord, *thou hast* heard the desire of the humble: *thou wilt* prepare their heart.” When you know that the Lord God is immutable, “the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever,” you may conclude without mistake that what he has done he is prepared to do again. The argument from the past to the future would be a sorry one if you were dealing with fallible man; for what man has done is no sure guarantee of what he may do; he is such a creature of freaks and whims: but when you have to deal with the Eternal God, who is faithful and true, and changes not, you may reckon with safety that the thing which has been is the thing which shall be. Well did the apostle say, “Who delivered us from so great a death, and doth deliver: in whom we trust that he will yet deliver us.”

On looking at the text again you will see that the same blessed logic is carried a step further; for you read, “Thou wilt,” and then again, “thou wilt”: “Thou wilt prepare their heart, thou wilt cause thine ear to hear.” Faith first of all concludes that God will bless because of former blessings, and then she is so sure of her conclusion that upon it she is prepared to build up a further confidence. This is a noble faith, worthy of imitation; but it is by no means common;—not a hundredth part so common as it ought to be. To doubtful minds it is difficult even to infer the future from a present fact immediately before their eye; but to the believing heart it is an easy thing to do something more than that, namely, to draw an inference of hope from a former inference of hope. Faith builds a sure abode with invisible stones. She expects because she has experienced, and experiences already what she expects. Why not? Is not faith the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen? Since that which we believe is sure, it is

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worthy to be the foundation of further faith. We are very fond of that verse—

“ And a ‘ new song ’ is in my mouth,  
To long-loved music set ;  
Glory to thee for all the grace  
I have not tasted yet.”

By such language we praise God for mercy not yet received ; and our text suggests another practical use of “ things not seen as yet,” namely, to make them, as apprehended by our faith, the basis of a still higher confidence in God. This is to be built up on our most holy faith. Rest assured that this is not constructing castles in the air ; for our faith is no delusion, but is made of solid, substantial stuff, before which even the supposed infallibilities of science are trifles light as air. Because our Good Shepherd has made us to lie down in green pastures, we argue that there is no cause for fear though we walk through the valley of death-shade, and from that we surely gather that goodness and mercy shall follow us all the days of our lives. Such reasoning is as accurate as the demonstrations of geometry. The Lord will never leave us to be ashamed of our hope. Learn this logic and it will stand you in good stead in times of distress, when nothing but certainty will sustain you. The Lord is good, and therefore he will be good : he will keep the feet of his saints, and because he will do this we shall enter his palace with joy.

Apply this logic to prayer. God has answered prayer, and therefore he will answer it. Of this first statement many of us are witnesses. The evidences of that truth are with us in daily experience ; we have proofs of the power of prayer as innumerable as the stars of heaven. Because the Lord has heard us out of his holy place we infer that he will still hear us, and therefore as long as we live will we call upon him. This is no casual thing, but it is Jehovah's perpetual name and standing memorial—the God that heareth prayer. Never while the earth endureth will he forsake the throne of grace and turn a deaf ear to the cries of his suppliant Israel.

The subject of this morning is thus introduced to you. It is necessary that you pray, for the needy must cry to their helper ; and it is profitable that you pray, for the bosoms of suppliants are filled with benedictions. It is not a vain thing to wait upon God ; it is your comfort, your strength, your life. If you seek honour it should be your delight to pray ; for nothing is more ennobling than to win the ear of the Lord of all. A man admitted to audience with the Most High is honoured in an unspeakable degree.

We shall speak this morning in the way of five observations drawn from our text. May each one be made profitable to us by the power of the Holy Spirit.

I. Our first observation is written upon the surface of the Scripture before us—THE LOWLIEST FORM OF PRAYER MAY BE MOST TRUE AND ACCEPTABLE. And what is that lowliest form of prayer ? Is it not described in the text ? “ The desire of the humble.” It is not the prayer of the serene faith of Abraham, nor the wrestling of energetic Jacob, nor the intercession of prevailing Moses, nor the pleading of holy Samuel, nor the commanding cry of Elias shutting and opening heaven :

it is only a desire—a motion of the heart towards good things ; and yet the Lord hears it. Indeed, the lowliest form of prayer may be the truest ; for the essence of all real prayer is desire. Words are but the habitation of prayer, the living tenant is desire. We see from our text that desires are prevailing prayers ; for the Lord has made a point of hearing them : “Thou hast heard the desire of the humble.” Other forms of prayer may be attractive to man, and yet they may have no influence whatever with the living God ; but this manner of supplication has been successful from of old, even as it is written,—“He will fulfil the desire of them that fear him,” and again, “The desire of the righteous shall be granted.” In fact, prayer is desire, as our poet puts it,—

“Prayer is the soul’s sincere desire,  
Utter’d or unexpress’d ;  
The motion of a hidden fire,  
That trembles in the breast.”

The lowest form of true prayer secures the ear of the Highest, and what more is needed ?

Observe, it is only *a desire* : “the desire of the humble.” A desire may be altogether unattended by speech. The suppliant may not be able to put his desire into words at all : he may be too sorrowful, his emotion may choke his utterance ; he may be too quiet, and so may be quite unversed in the use of speech. He may be only able to pour forth groanings that cannot be uttered, and tears whose eloquence is silent ; yet God is pleased to hear the desire which lacks expression. Many prayers are very prettily expressed ; in fact, they are expressed so grandly that their tawdry fineries will not be tolerated in heaven. Those prayers will never enter heaven’s gate which are meant to catch the applause of man. God will say, “They were meant for men, and let men have them.” He does not stoop to accept man’s leavings, and if a prayer is meant to be a feast for man, God will not be a second-rate guest at its table. On the other hand, many sincere persons condemn themselves because they cannot offer public prayer as their brethren do : they even tremble, perhaps, to pray before their families, and this is a grief to them. I think, if they are men, they should prove their manhood by overcoming such diffidence. I would urge them to make the attempt with much resolution and perseverance ; but should they fail in it through positive inability, there will be cause for regret, but no reason for self-condemnation. There may be more prayer in the silent than in the fluent. God has heard prayers which nobody else could possibly have heard, because there was no vocal sound about them. So quick is the ear of God that he heareth that which is not properly the subject of hearing : the true prayer which abides in silence shall not meet with a silent God.

This desire may not be recommended by any conscious attainments on the part of the offerer. The man may reach far in his desire, but he may have attained to little beyond. He may have a wealth of desire and a poverty of everything else, and yet he may be heard of the Lord. Possibly his confession may run thus,—“I desire to be humble, but I lament my pride ; I desire to be strong in faith, but I mourn my unbelief ; I desire to be fervent, but I sigh over my lukewarmness ; I desire to

be holy, but I confess my transgressions; I desire my prayer should be such as God can accept, but I fear that I waver, or ask amiss." Now such a confession, if penitently presented, will not prevent our obtaining the promise; for the Lord hath heard the desire of the humble. If your heart seethes and boils with desires, the steam thereof will rise to heaven. If your stock-in-trade is made up of empty vessels, and little else, the Lord can deal with you as he did with the prophet's widow, "who had empty vessels not a few." Your little oil of grace he can multiply till every vessel is filled to the brim.

Have you desires?—great, hungry, thirsty desires? Then bring them to the Lord. Are your desires as insatiable as the horse-leech, which is always sucking, but which always craves for more, crying ever, "Give, give, give"? Then say with David, "All my desires are before thee," and be assured that the Lord satisfieth the desire of every living thing. Be comforted if your desires are awake. You are praying, and your cry is being heard: you shall yet say, "This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him." Your desires have voices of their own: they knock hard at heaven's door, and it shall be opened unto them.

Note again, that this desire may be unaccompanied by any confident expectation. When you pray you ought to believe the promise and expect its fulfilment. It is the duty and the privilege of every suppliant to believe that when he prays in the name of Jesus he must and shall be heard. But sometimes humility, which is a good thing, is attended by a want of faith, which is an evil thing; and this much hinders prayer. Humility is deceived by unbelief, and so it gives way to the dark thought that its poor feeble prayer will not speed with God. I fear that in some cases this want of expectancy is an effectual barrier to prayer, and prevents its being answered; but it is forgiven to naturally despondent, heavily-laden spirits, whose fears are not so much doubts of God as a deeply humiliating judgment of themselves. It is not so much the case that their faith is sinfully defective as that they have a painfully acute sense of their own unworthiness; and so when they cry they hope that the Lord will hear them, and they mean to wait upon him till he does; but they are sore afraid. They will go nowhere else, for other hope they have none but that which lies in the free grace and sovereign mercy of God; but yet they do not exercise that happy expectancy which the sure promise warrants their enjoying. My brethren, I would chide your unbelief, but I would still encourage your desires; for that desire which God hears is not to be despised. The text saith, "Lord, thou hast heard the desire of the humble," and the Lord will yet hear your humble sighs and groans; and you shall be surprised to find the Lord doing for you exceeding abundantly above what you asked or even thought. May your faith grow exceedingly, being fed upon the heavenly food which the Lord deals out to those who hunger and thirst after righteousness.

This leads me to observe that this commencing form of prayer which the Lord nevertheless hears, is here further described as "*the desire of the humble*." It has this advantage about it, that it is free from pride. Some men's prayers, if they were to pray them as their foolish heart really desires, would be requests that they might be made famous. Startle not when I say it,—I fear that many men proudly ask to be humble:



they desire to be humble in order that they may be admired for it. I have no doubt whatever that some professors seek great grace that they may be highly thought of and greatly set by in the market of the church. Have we not all found that in the rushing stream of our earnest zeal there will be some back-water, which runs not towards God but towards ourselves? Have we not even striven to win souls that we might be notable as soul-winners? Ay, and have we not sought to glorify God that we might shine in the reflection of that glory? "Come with me, and see my zeal for the Lord," has been the language of many a Jehu. Oh, it is hard to keep out pride. This psalm says much concerning the proud man and the oppressor, whom God abhors, and will surely visit in judgment; and then shines forth this bright word, like a lone star in a dark night. Never was precious pearl found in a rougher oyster-shell. May the Lord keep us humble if we are so, and make us humble if we are not so. I believe every Christian man has a choice between being humble and being humbled. Now, to be humble is a sweet thing: there is no lovelier spot on the road to the celestial city than the Valley of Humiliation: he that lives in it dwells among flowers and birds, and may sing all day long, like the shepherd boy whose song ran thus,—

"He that is down need fear no fall,  
He that is low no pride;  
He that is humble ever shall  
Have God to be his guide."

If you do not choose to be humble you will have to be humbled; and that is not at all a desirable thing. To be humbled is to be sorely smitten and made to suffer shame in the estimation of your fellow-men, both ungodly and godly. Certain persons who have carried their heads very high have struck them against the beam, and have had to go with bruised foreheads for the rest of their lives. God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble. Therefore may God help us to offer before him "the desire of the humble."

"The desire of the humble" is saturated with a gospel spirit, and therefore is acceptable with the God of all grace. Pride seems born of the law, though I scarce know why it should be; for the law censures and condemns. Humility is the child of the gospel, and is brought up upon the knees of grace. If thou wouldst be a child of God thou must be lowly in thine own esteem. If thou wouldst be heard in prayer thou must come to God as needy and empty. Low thoughts of ourselves are the companions of prevailing prayers. No man may expect to receive out of the fulness that is treasured up in Christ Jesus until he is willing to confess his own poverty. Grace for grace will be given only to those who feel need upon need; all successful pleadings must find their argument in free grace. We must never urge claims against the Lord as though he were our debtor; for then mercy will not treat with us: we have appealed unto the Cæsar of justice and unto Cæsar we must go. Let us have done with merits and deserts, and let this be our cry, "For thy mercy and for thy truth's sake, and for thy Son's sake, hear thou the voice of my prayer." This is the proper gospel spirit; but if we plead in any other fashion, we shall be sent empty away.

Still, this "desire of the humble" is apt to be somewhat restricted and straitened. If we contract our desires to the measure of our deserts, they will shrivel into nothing; for our deserts are less than nothing. It is ill to pray according to your sense of what you have a right to ask. You have a legal right to ask for nothing but justice, and who among us can abide its action apart from Jesus? "If thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?" You had better pray according to God's command, and that runs thus: "Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it." The truest humility is that which is immediately obedient to the gracious precept, and accepts without a question that which the Lord so freely gives. We have a natural right to nothing; but when the Lord commands us to open our mouth wide, he thereby gives us a covenant right to all things. Yet, dear brother, if your humility should cramp your desire, if you feel as if you would desire a great boon but dare not, still it is a desire.

If you say, "I see the sweetness of the mercy, but it seems too good for such a soul as mine," yet I spy at the back of your humility a true and strong desire, and I pray that the Lord may hear that desire and answer thee for his mercy's sake. Forget not this first truth—that what seems to be the lowest form of prayer is, nevertheless, true prayer.

II. Our second point is full of comfort to those who have begun to pray. GOD IS QUICK TO HEAR THE LOWLIEST PRAYER: "Thou hast heard the desire of the humble." *This must be a divine science*,—this art of hearing desires. We have heard a good deal lately about thought-reading. I give no opinion of that matter among men; but here is a wonderful instance of it with the Lord. "Thou hast heard the desire of the humble." This kind of desire-reading is the prerogative of God alone. He knows our desires even when we do not know them ourselves. Sitting in this Tabernacle you are desiring, but it is quite impossible for the person sitting next to you to know your wishes, and it is quite as well, perhaps, that it is so. Certain it is that the servant of God, Eli himself, fresh from the shrine of the Most High, could not read Hannah's desire. Her lips were moving, and one would think if anything would be learned it might be from the moving of the lips; but Eli thought her drunken, and therefore chattering to herself, and so he rebuked her. Was it not a mercy for Hannah that God heard her humble desire, and knew all about it? Beloved, the Lord is reading your thought now: my dear sister, your groaning out of the very depths has ascended to the heights. You would not like to tell your inward feelings: perhaps your secret is too painful to be told: never mind, God's ear is so quick that he can hear your desires. Wonderful art! We should be very glad if the Lord had promised to hear us when we speak; but he has gone far beyond that, and he hears the unspeakable and unutterable. Was there ever power and pity like to this? Be comforted, you that are full of desires this morning, and are sitting here with hearts ready to break, crying in your spirit, "Oh that the Lord would hear me! Oh that he would give me peace! Oh that the days of my mourning were ended! Oh that I knew where I might find him, that I might come even to his seat!" Do not sink in despair, there is no reason for fear; your case is among

the most hopeful, for it is the way of the Lord to hear the desire of the humble.

*It is an art which has been exercised by God in all ages*; he does not merely possess the power, but he exercises it. I like my text for putting it in the past tense: "Thou hast heard the desire of the humble." It is a matter of frequent fact, and not merely a possible event. It is not the bare assertion of a power, but the record of a deed. All along through history, wherever gracious men have lived, their hearts have talked with God as well without words as with them. The pulsings of human spirits God has heard as surely as if they had been loud as the beat of drum. The sigh of the soul has come up before him as clearly as if it had been the note of a clarion. The Lord's ear is never heavy, he is not weary of the feebleness and faultiness of the poor man's petition. Still the Lord heareth in the day of trouble, and the name of the God of Jacob defends us.

"When God inclines the heart to pray,  
He hath an ear to hear;  
To him there's music in a groan,  
And beauty in a tear."

*To-day let this be told*; it ought not to be buried in ungrateful silence; it is mentioned in the text, let it be mentioned in your conversation. If some here present had the opportunity, we could tell you how God has heard our desires, and how at times before the desire has actually been formed in the soul the answer has come, according to that word, "Before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear." We had a desire laid upon our heart which we never communicated to any living person except the living God, and we carried that desire in our heart for weeks and months, constantly allowing it to burn in our bosom, and frequently letting it break out in groans and broken cries: and in due time our sighing reached the heart of God. As surely as we have sown in prayer we have in due season reaped a harvest of blessing. Our Lord even in Gethsemane was heard in that he feared—sure pledge to all his redeemed that they shall be heard in their hour of darkness. Happy are they who dwell in God, for they may have what they please at the mercy-seat. Is it not written, "Delight thyself also in the Lord, and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart"? Has it not been so with you, O ye who abide under the shadow of the Almighty? I charge you then, abundantly to utter the memory of his great goodness. Fail not to tell your experience of the Lord's faithfulness; for God loses much glory, and poor sinners and saints too, lose much encouragement to pray when children of God are silent about their success at the throne of grace. Oh, I wish I could be the means of stirring some this morning to pray the prayer of faith while sitting here. You may say, "I will pray when I get home." You may do so, if you please; but I am urging you to something more speedy. Remember the publican: it was in God's house that he prayed; though he did not dare to lift his eyes to heaven, yet he sighed in his soul this prayer,—“God be merciful to me a sinner,” and he went down to his house justified rather than the other. I do not ask you to withhold that prayer till you reach home: would it not be a grand thing to be saved here, and to go home justified? You shall have that unspeakable blessing now if your



desire be a true one, and you pour it out at once before the Lord believingly. He has heard the like many times, and is prepared to hear you in the same manner. Why should not this first Sunday in October be a day of grace unto your souls? "Seek ye the Lord while he may be found; call ye upon him while he is near." This is an accepted time; the Spirit of God is near. If God is now inclining you to pray, do not resist the gentle movement of his Spirit, but let your prayer come forth, encouraged by the sweet language of my text. Say you unto the prayer-hearing God, "Thou hast heard the desire of the humble. Why shouldest thou not hear my desire at this hour, and bless me, even me also, O my Father?"

III. Thirdly, we will remark that **THE HEART IS THE MAIN MATTER IN PRAYER**. That is clearly shown in the text: "Lord, thou hast heard the desire of the humble." Desires are the fruit of the heart. "Thou wilt prepare their heart." When God comes to deal with men in a way of grace, his first business is to prepare their hearts; so that most assuredly the state of the heart is of prime importance. The heart is the source, the seat, and the essence of supplication. Prayer with the heart is the heart of prayer: the cry of our soul is the soul of our cry.

*Without the heart prayer is a wretched mockery.* There is as much grace in the bark of a dog or the grunt of a swine as in a form of prayer if the heart be absent; and God is as likely, nay, more likely, to hear the cry of ravens and young lions, than to regard prayers uttered in chapels or churches, meeting-houses or cathedrals, if the mind be not in earnest. Do not say, "I read my collect this morning;" you may read fifty collects, and be none the better: do not say, "I went through the prayer which I learned from a godly mother;" you may go through it twenty thousand times, and yet never pray once. Unless the heart speaks with God, thou hast done nothing for thine own good with all thy paternosters or other goodly words; nay, thou mayest have done something to thine own hurt in all this pretence of praying. I fear that much so-called public prayer is nothing better than presumptuous sin. If your child should come to you and ask a favour in an affected voice, would you notice him? If, instead of saying, "Dear father, I want so-and-so," he should take up a book and intone such words as these, "Dearly beloved father, I have to request of thee that thou in thy great affection wilt give unto me such and such things," you would not regard his nonsense. You would say, "Come, boy, what do you want? Tell me plainly"; and if he continued to intone, you would drive him out of the room, perhaps with the aid of your foot. I fear that this praying in sing-song is the most fearful mockery God ever hears. Fancy Peter, when he was beginning to sink, intoning, "Lord, save me." When the heart really gets to speak with God, it cannot talk in affected tones: it throws such rubbish overboard. But cannot a man pray with his heart and yet use a written prayer? Certainly he can. Many have done so for years. If you cannot walk without your crutches, I would sooner you walked with them than not at all. Still, it is not the best words put together by the most devout men that ever lived, nor the holiest language composed extemporaneously by yourself, that can make up prayer if the heart be gone. Words are seldom more than the baggage of prayer. Language at best is but the flesh in



which prayer is embodied : the desire of the heart is the life of the prayer. See thou to thy heart, for God sees to it : "Thou wilt prepare their heart." Sometimes the Lord puts words into men's mouths : he says, "Take with you words, and come unto me," and thus he prepares words for their use ; but in general the main concern with God is that the heart be prepared to plead with him.

Without the heart prayer is a nullity, and *when there is but little heart, prayer is a failure*. He that prays with little desire asks God to refuse him. If you go through your prayer, and your mind is wandering up and down about a thousand vanities, your desires are feeble, and your supplication will effect little. Prayer must be fervent to be effectual, it must be ardent to be acceptable. If the utter failure of your prayer would not greatly grieve you, and if its success would not much gratify you, then depend upon it you will have to wait long at mercy's wicket ere it will admit you. "The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force." Importunity is indispensable : our Lord has given us many parables to that effect. To play at praying will never do : heart and soul must be fully awake ; for no sleepy prayer can enter heaven. We must praise God with our whole heart, and we must pray in the same manner. If a double-minded man may not expect to receive anything of the Lord, neither may a half-hearted man. Above all things, keep thine heart with all diligence if thou wouldest speed at the throne.

*Success comes to the prayer of a glowing heart.* When the soul grows warm, and the spirit is fervent, and desires are strong, then, brother, do not spare thy prayers. We are not always in that condition, let us pray much when we are. We are bound to prepare ourselves for prayer ; but I believe the best qualifications are strong desires and intense longings. No preparation for food is equal to intense hunger. You have the best sauce with your meat when you are hungry. It will be your wisdom when your desires are sharp-set to pray more than you ordinarily do. You cannot always pray alike ; but when good times come use them. When a fair wind fills the sails of desire, then make all possible headway. Set apart a longer season for private devotion when the soul is all alive and active in it. At another time you may have to try very hard and make but small progress, for the chariot wheels may be taken off : let it not at such a time be a source of regret that you wasted a happier season. Cease not to obtain blessings beyond number both for thyself, for the church, and for a perishing world ; but take heed that thy heart be found greatly exercised with longings of soul before God.

IV. Fourthly, GOD HIMSELF PREPARES THE HEARTS OF HIS PEOPLE. "Thou wilt prepare their heart." I am greatly rejoiced by this statement that God will prepare our hearts to pray, because it is a most *important* business on which so much depends. On the heart the whole machinery of life depends, and it needs preparing, especially for devotion. You cannot spring out of bed and on every occasion pray in a moment without thought or reflection : you cannot say to yourself, "I have just been listening to ungodly talk ; and now I am going to pray." It will be poor, pitiful praying which springs up from the barren soil of thoughtlessness. We need preparation in coming into the courts of the Lord's

house : the soul had need put her shoes from off her feet because the place is holy. But this preparation is often as *difficult* as it is needful ; and therefore it is a great mercy that our God undertakes to work it in us. Surely none but the Lord can prepare a heart for prayer. One old writer says it is far harder work to raise the big bell into the steeple than to ring it afterwards. This witness is true. When the bell is well hung you can ring it readily enough ; but in that uplifting of the heart lies the work and the labour. Before musicians begin to play, they attend to their strings and see that their instruments are in order ; you wish that the operation could be dispensed with, but it cannot be, and it is one of the most needful parts of the musician's work. Until he has learned to tune his instrument, what does he know ? Until he has tuned it, what can he do ? I wish we were all made ready, as a people prepared for the Lord.

These processes by which the heart is prepared *may have commenced far back*. Our gracious God may have prepared the heart of a man to pray to-day by a work which he wrought upon him, or for him, twenty years ago : the Lord may be working a man up to a certain prayer by years of sorrow or joy. The poet who composes a sonnet may not be able to tell you why the inspiration came to him at that particular moment ; for it may have been the outcome of his soul throughout the whole of his life. That which the songster threw into words to-day may have lain hidden in his soul from his boyhood. He was not prepared for penning his stanzas then, but his after-life trained him to speak in numbers, and to clothe noble thoughts in the dress of attractive language. So may it be with our prayers : they may be the juice of a life-vintage, the ripened harvest of youth and manhood. In any case, God prepares the heart to be blest when he is prepared to bless it.

One of the most difficult things in preparation for prayer is the *restraining of loose and wandering thoughts*. I do not know how perfect brethren keep themselves free from every evil thought, for I find myself defeated often when I would shut out these vile intruders. Honestly, I may express my belief that these carnal boasters have as many vain thoughts as other people. The ravenous birds will come down upon the sacrifice, even when Abraham offers it, and it costs infinite pains to drive them away. Intruding thoughts surround us like a plague of flies : they are here, and there, and everywhere. It is well, indeed, that God should prepare our hearts ; for in this one point our weakness is complete. Egypt suffered from a plague of flies, which all Pharaoh's armies could not drive away ; but when the Lord heard the prayer of Moses, it is said, "The Lord removed the swarms of flies : there remained not one." That was a deliverance indeed : truly this was the finger of God. When the Lord comes to prepare his people's hearts by his Spirit, he chases away every wandering thought, so that there remains not one. The tradition says of Solomon's temple that though much meat was consumed there, and this naturally attracts flies, yet there was never a fly in the holy place. I wish it were so with our holy place ! O that it might be so that whenever we pray all evil thoughts may be driven out. This is a miracle, and none can perform it but the Lord our God. "Thou wilt prepare their heart."

Next, the Lord prepares his people's hearts by *giving them a deep*

*sense of what they want.* I know your grief, and your temptation, and your misery, and the crying out of your spirit under the lashes of conscience; but all this is right, thus you are instructed in the art and mystery of supplication. Nobody cries to Christ so well as the man who is beginning to sink. Jonah's cry in the whale's belly was the most intense prayer he ever prayed. When the iron enters into your soul, then you cry unto the Lord in your trouble. A sentence of death in your own soul is a mighty quickener of supplication; when your spirit is overwhelmed with sorrow, then look up to Christ, the Saviour, and find him to your soul's joy. Our desires are apt to sleep, but when the Lord by his Spirit reveals to us our spiritual poverty, we long, and pine, and sigh for spiritual blessings.

When a man out of the anguish of his heart cries for mercy, then he begins to search out and *lay hold upon the promise.* To bring the promise to remembrance is a part of the Holy Spirit's work: he takes of the things of Christ and shows them unto us. Oh, how blessedly a man can pray when he gets hold of a promise, when he is sure that God hath a blessing in store for him, when he is positive that the Lord is faithful to his covenant, and will not withhold any good thing from him. The Lord also works in us *strong faith, holy perseverance, and high expectancy,* and in all these ways he prepares our hearts to pray.

Nor is this all: the text does not say that God will only prepare the heart to pray, but it says, "Thou wilt prepare the heart," and this is a wider work, making ready for other matters besides prayer. He will prepare the heart to receive the answer, for many of us are not as yet ready to enjoy what God is ready to bestow. Do you want anything which Jesus can give you? Give your heart up to the Holy Spirit, that he may prepare you to seek the blessing, and prepare you to receive the blessing when the time comes for the Lord to grant it. "Thou wilt prepare their heart;" this is wonderful condescension on God's part, and on our part we ought to feel the utmost encouragement to prepare our own hearts for earnest supplication.

V. Lastly, PRAYER FROM PREPARED HEARTS MUST BE HEARD. "Thou wilt prepare their heart, thou wilt cause thine ear to hear." I wish you would join these two sentences together in your minds, and carry them home with you. Let the two bells ring in harmony.—"Thou wilt prepare their heart: thou wilt cause thine ear to hear." Ring them over and over again; and let their blended music linger in your ear.

First, *if God has had love enough to prepare your heart to pray, he has grace enough to give you the blessing.* The more difficult thing of the two is not to give the blessing, but to prepare your heart to cry for it: if he has done the one he will certainly do the other.

Consider *the truthfulness and the faithfulness, and the goodness of God,* and you will see that it is not possible that he should teach a man to pray for a blessing which he will not give. I cannot imagine any one of you tantalising your child by exciting in him a desire that you do not intend to gratify. It were a very ungenerous thing to offer alms to the poor, and then, when they hold out their hand for it, to mock their poverty with a denial. It were a cruel addition to the miseries of the sick, if they were taken to the hospital and there left to die

untended and uncared for. Where God leads you to pray he means you to receive. You find a holy desire in your heart; the Lord put that desire into your heart, and for the honour of his infinite majesty, lest he stain his goodness and dishonour his great name, he must hear you. With what comfort would I address those here who are beginning to pray. I know I speak to some who are uneasy, unrestful; you tell us you are seeking peace, that day and night a desire for salvation occupies the entire chamber of your soul. Well, this did not come from your own nature; neither the devil nor the old Adam has taught you to pray. Dear hearer, be sure that the great Father who is moving you to cry to him is hearing you—he is inclining his ear to catch the faintest moan of your spirit. Believe that he is hearing you. Cast yourself at the feet of his dear Son. Behold the wounds of Jesus; let these invite you to draw nigh to God. I know of no such eloquent mouths as the wounds of the dying Lord. Let them persuade you to come to Jesus, to trust, to rest at his dear feet; for since he has inclined your heart to pray he is about to hear you and bless you. The Lord be with you for Jesus' sake. Amen.

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PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Psalm cii.

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HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—34 (Version II.), 998, 86.

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