

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

INTERCESSION AND SUPPLICATION.

A Sermon

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DELIVERED BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

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“Art not thou he, O LORD our God? therefore we will wait upon thee.”—
Jeremiah xiv. 22.

THIS is an instance of amazing yet holy boldness. The prophet had received from the Lord the explicit command, “Pray not for this people for their good;” and yet, after expostulation with God, his heart grew so warm with sacred fervour, and his spirit became fired with such a passionate zeal, that he could not help pleading for the sinful nation. He poured out his soul in the vehement prayer, and said to the Lord, “We will wait upon thee.” This was, perhaps, disobedience in the outward form; but it was not disobedience as to the inner spirit of the prophet, for the Lord counteth not as disobedience the earnest pleadings and yearnings of the heart of his people. This is a marvellous instance of how, under the most discouraging circumstances, when there appears no prospect whatever of success, men, who are moved of God to pray for their fellows, will cling to his skirts, and still intercede on behalf of those who are altogether unworthy of their supplications.

One of the reasons why Jeremiah resolved that he would still wait upon God was because the case was such an urgent one. The land was chapped through the long drought; the poor beasts were dying of thirst; men and women were pale and pinched with hunger, and there was no one who could deliver them out of their distress. The heavens could not pour down rain of themselves, and the gods of the heathen could not render any help; so Jeremiah says, “Therefore we will wait upon thee. It is our only hope; and though it seems to be a forlorn one, yet, since it is the only one we have, we will cling to it with desperate resolve.”

There are two things which appear to me to be strikingly illustrated by our text and its connection; the first is, the beauty of an intercessor, and I want you so to admire it as to *imitate the intercession*; and the second is, the necessity which drives men to

God, and I want you to *feel the necessity which drives you to wait upon the Lord*. May God the Holy Spirit make you to feel it!

I. First, I want you to see the beauty of a true intercessor, and to endeavour, by the power of God's Spirit, to IMITATE THE INTER-CESSION.

Jeremiah interceded for the people, but we have not to seek far before we discover the reason why he did it. God, in infinite mercy, gave the weeping prophet to his sinful people in order that they might not be left as sheep without a shepherd, and be quite given over to utter destruction; and wherever you meet with a man, who intercedes with God for his fellow-men, and makes this the main business of his life, you see in him one of the most precious gifts of God's grace to the age in which he lives. *It is God that writes intercession upon men's hearts*. All true prayer comes from him, but especially that least selfish and most Christlike form of prayer called intercession; when the suppliant forgets all about himself, and his own needs, and all his pleadings, his tears, and his arguments are on behalf of others. I repeat that such men are a most precious gift from heaven; and I feel certain that, before the Reformation, there must have been hundreds of godly men and women who were day and night interceding with the Lord, and giving him no rest until he answered their supplications; and Luther and the rest of the Reformers were sent by God in answer to the many prayers which history has never recorded, but which are written in the Lord's book of remembrance. And when Wesley and Whitefield, in more modern times, stirred the smouldering embers of religion in this land, it was because godly people, perhaps poor, obscure men and women in their cottages, reading the Scriptures, saw the sad state of irreligion and indifference into which the nation had fallen, and groaned over it, and spread the case before God. I know not how to estimate the worth of even one man who has power with God in prayer. When John Knox went upstairs to plead for Scotland, it was the greatest event in Scottish history. All things are possible with the man who, like Elias upon Carmel, casts himself down upon the earth, and puts his face between his knees, and cries unto him that heareth prayer, till the heavens, which were like brass, suddenly drop with plenteous showers of rain. There is no power like that of intercession. The secret springs that move the puppets of earth—for kings and princes are often little more than that,—are the prayers of God's believing people. The hidden wheels that start the whole machinery, and that keep it in motion, are the prayers of God's people. Oh, if the Lord makes you an intercessor, my dear brother, even if you cannot speak with men for God, if you know how to speak with God for men, you occupy a position that is second to none. God help you to fill it well!

True intercessors, then, are special gifts from God; and when he raises up men or women for this high service, you will find that *such persons plead with mighty arguments*. You must have noticed, as we read the chapter, that Jeremiah knew well what he was praying about. He had, in his mind's eye, all those nobles of the land who were reduced to such poverty that they sent their children

out to hunt for water. His prophetic eye could even see the hinds in the field leaving their fawns to die, because there was no grass for them to eat, and no water for them to drink. Jeremiah had upon his heart all the agony of the nation, and he prayed as if his were the thirst, and as if he himself were perishing of hunger. He took the burden of the guilty people upon himself, and became their mouthpiece to God, although they did not thank him for pleading for them, but smote him, and despitefully used him. Yet he took all their griefs into his own sympathetic heart, and he pleaded mightily with God while he had all that great burden resting upon his spirit.

I want you to notice how he pleads. First, he pleads God's name. "Lord," saith he, "these people are called Jehovah's people; and though they deserve nothing but condemnation at thy hands, yet, if thou dost not bless them, the heathen will say, 'Jehovah forsakes his people; this is what comes of being the chosen nation;' and so thy great name will be dishonoured in the earth." And then Jeremiah uses a very strong expression,—for using which, I understand, a minister has recently been called to account; and I do not wonder at that, for, if it had not been inspired, it would have been too strong an utterance from the mouth of any man: "Do not disgrace the throne of thy glory." That throne of God's glory was the mercy-seat; and if it could be carried away to Babylon, the heathen would rejoice, and the daughters of the uncircumcised would triumph; and thus the throne of God's glory would be disgraced. Jeremiah rightly felt that this was a strong argument, so he urged it in pleading with the Lord, "Do not let thy glory be tarnished, do interpose to prevent such a calamity."

As the strongest argument of all, he pleads the covenant,—and that is always a masterly argument with the Lord. Turn to the 21st verse: "Remember, break not thy covenant with us." God had entered into a covenant with Abraham, and with Isaac, and with Jacob, and with David; and though the sin of the people might well be conceived to have made the covenant null and void, and though they certainly did not deserve that he should keep his covenant with them, yet Jeremiah felt emboldened to say, "Break not thy covenant with us." Depend upon it, God is never a covenant-breaking God, and no plea has greater weight with him than "the covenant, the covenant." O brothers and sisters, if God has made us intercessors, let us come with holy boldness to the throne of grace, and let us plead for our nation, and for our age, and for our kinsfolk, that God would bless them; and let this be our chief argument,—for the honour of thy holy name, for the glory of thy throne, and for the sake of the covenant which thou hast made with our great Surety, forsake not those whom thou hast chosen, however undeserving they have proved to be!

Notice next, that, when a man has his heart set upon this blessed work of intercession, *it makes him quick to seize every advantage that he can when he is pleading with God.* Jeremiah argued thus with God, "Lord, thou sayest to me, 'Pray not for this people for their good;' but it is the false prophets who have deceived them, so,

O Lord, pity the poor people. They are misled; the priests have led them astray. They are poor silly sheep, that have followed the shepherds that deceived them; therefore, have pity on them, and spare them." I like that sacred ingenuity on the part of Jeremiah, leading him to catch at such a plea as that, and to urge it before God. That is something like Abraham did when he, too, had a desperate case in hand,—the case of Sodom and Gomorrah. It is only these great intercessors who can take up such cases as these. There he stands to plead for Sodom and Gomorrah; and mark the holy boldness which he uses before God. "Lord," said he, "peradventure there be fifty righteous within the city; peradventure there be forty-and-five righteous there; peradventure there be forty righteous there;" and so on, till he said, "Peradventure there are ten righteous there; wilt thou also destroy the righteous with the wicked?" That was fine pleading, and God yielded to it, for he would have spared the city for the sake of ten righteous people if they could have been found; and if you know how to plead with God, you will rake up everything which may in any degree tell on the behalf of the people, even as your Master did, for, when he could say nothing else in favour of his murderers, he said, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." Even their ignorance he turned into some kind of plea, and in his wondrous mercy used it in praying to his Father. May we all learn how to plead for sinners like that!

True intercessors resemble Jeremiah in another respect, *they will not be turned aside from their pleading*. If they meet with rebuffs, and no answer seems to come to their supplications, they plead on still. It is a wondrous sight to see a mother—a true, tender, gracious mother,—pleading with God for her son. She began pleading for him while yet he lay in the cradle, or before that; she cried to God for him when he was learning to walk with tottering footsteps. She followed him with her prayers through the devious ways of his boyhood and youth; and also when he went away from home, and left her to sorrow over him. Parental restraint was gone; even maternal love was rejected, as he roamed over a great part of the world. He has grown into a bronzed man now; his face is tanned with the scorching sun of the equator, and he has come home; but his mother's prayers have followed or accompanied him wherever he has gone. She has persevered in pleading with God for him. True, he has been a Sabbath-breaker, and a swearer, and the very sound of his voice has terrified the dear old soul when she has heard him say hard things against the God of Israel. But you should hear her pray when she is alone. She cannot say, "Lord, save my son, for there is in him some good thing towards thee;" but she cries, "O thou that art mighty to save, I cannot let thee go until thou dost save my poor sinful boy! Hast thou not said 'Call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me'? Lord, I am in sore trouble about my son; I beseech thee to have pity upon him, and save him. Didst thou not listen to the Syrophenician woman when she prayed for her child? Oh, hear me as I pray for mine!" Ah! I cannot put it as pathetically as she does, for there

is a wondrous sacred ingenuity in the true mother's heart that makes her plead with peculiar power for her child even when he has grown to manhood. I hope you know what I mean because this is what you have done. When, under great discouragements, seeing those who are the subjects of your supplication going from bad to worse,—when you see them get hardened, and apparently incorrigible, and invulnerable,—when even the arrows of the Word do not seem to touch them or pierce them,—still persevere in prayer. And I will say what some may think a very strong thing,—even if you should have reason to fear that they have committed the sin which is unto death,—you recollect how John puts it, “I do not say that he shall pray for it;” but he does not say that you are not to do so; therefore, take advantage of the negative, and pray on still. Yes, even until their souls have passed beyond the reach of change, into the unseen world, pursue them with your persistent intercession; and it may be that you shall yet have your heart's desire concerning them, notwithstanding the fact that, as yet, everything seems to tend in the contrary direction.

Now, dear friends, let me say that, if any of us shall ever learn how to offer such prayer as this,—if we shall ever be able to intercede with God in this manner,—*we shall become imitators of our blessed Lord Jesus himself*, for he was, on earth, pre-eminently, the Intercessor. If you could have seen him coming forth in the morning, to preach the gospel and to heal the sick, you might have noticed how his garments were covered with the dew which had fallen upon him as he had knelt all night in prayer to God. He could often truly say, “My head is filled with dew, and my locks with the drops of the night;” for he had spent the whole night upon the lone mountain-side agonizing for the souls of those he loved. That sorrowful lament of his—“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not;”—was only a flash of the fire that always burnt within his heart. The tears that fell from our Saviour's eyes, as he wept over Jerusalem, dropped from a cloud that always rested on his soul, which was ever filled with a deep sympathetic compassion even for those who had despised and rejected him. And now to-day, my brethren, though he has put off the seamless garment that he wore on earth, and has put on his royal, priestly vesture white as snow, he still wears the golden girdle that John saw in the Revelation. The eyes of faith may see him up there, with no care upon his brow, no spittle upon his cheeks, no scourges for his back; but standing, amidst the harps of angels and the songs of seraphs, before his Father's throne as our great Intercessor still, for he ever liveth to make intercession for us, so that,—

“For all that come to God by him,”—

there may be eternal and certain salvation. Oh, if we could only hear him pray! Of course, there cannot be tears and cries such as became Gethsemane and its humiliation; but there is as much

earnestness in thy cry, O thou blessed Lover of sinners, in the midst of thy glory as there was in the depths of thy shame!

Beloved brethren and sisters in Christ, learn from your Lord and Saviour how to be mighty in intercession. I give you this blessed work to do, all of you who truly know and love him. As I have said before, you may not all be able to speak to men for God, but you can all speak with God for men. This morning,* I told you how to use one hand for battle by not concealing the words of the Holy One; now here is the way to use the other hand for battle by drawing nigh to God in powerful, prevalent intercession. With these two hands uplifted, this church, like Joshua, shall utterly destroy Amalek, and the sun and moon shall stand still while it is being done; and so long as Moses prays, and Aaron and Hur hold up his hands, the victory must surely come.

II. Now I want your very earnest attention to the second, and, perhaps, the more important portion of my discourse, in which I am going to urge you to FEEL THE NECESSITY WHICH DRIVES YOU TO GOD.

Tried believer, here is a lesson for you. Have you come to a very difficult place? Are you in very sore trouble,—such trouble as you never knew before? Then wait upon the Lord; and if at first he does not answer you, and it seems as if the very gates of heaven are shut against you, still continue to wait upon the Lord. Where else can you go if you turn away from him? You are shut up to this one course, so do not seek any other way out of your difficulty. Take that blasphemous letter of Sennacherib, and spread it before the Lord, as Hezekiah did. Take that bitter grief, and tell it all in his ears. To whom or whither should you go if you should turn from him? Therefore, cling to him, and though he slay you, still trust in him, for you have nobody else to whom you can trust.

But I want, mainly, to speak to the sinner. Perhaps I am addressing some who, by the Holy Spirit's teaching, have become aware of their danger, who therefore are longing to find eternal salvation; but they are afraid they never shall be able to do so. My dear friend, go and wait upon God, and ask him to save you. Present your case before him now, and plead with him to have mercy upon you, and then show that your supplication is genuine by accepting the salvation which he sets before you in Christ Jesus for all who believe in his name.

In order to urge you to wait upon God, I would just say these few things. First, *you must perish unless God shall hear you*. You say that you have prayed to the Lord for a month, and yet you have received no answer. Well, even though that is the case, forsake not the posts of his doors, for there is no other door at which you can knock with any hope of success. Perhaps you say, "I have tried to believe in Jesus, but I cannot." I will not correct your mistake this time, but I will say this: remember, that, if you do not believe in Jesus Christ, there is no one else in whom you can believe in order to be saved, "for there is none other name under heaven given

* See *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, No. 1,471, "Concealing the Words of God."

among men whereby we must be saved." It is Christ, or nothing. It is faith in Christ, or eternal destruction. It is laying hold upon Jesus Christ, or else banishment for ever from the presence of Jehovah's glory. You are brought to this pass, that God must save you, or you are damned for ever; God himself must save you, or you are a lost man. You are shut up to that alternative; so, being shut up to it, say to the Lord, with all your heart, "Therefore will I wait upon thee."

Now, bethink you, what else can you do? If you want to be saved, what can you rely upon but the grace of God in Jesus Christ? *Your past life avails not.* Would you dare to lean upon that broken reed? If you are self-righteous, and reckon yourself to be among the best of mankind, or think that you have done no great wrong, well, then, I do not know that I have any gospel to preach to you, for our Lord Jesus himself said, "They that are whole have no need of the physician, but they that are sick: I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." But if the Lord has been dealing with you by his Holy Spirit, and convincing you of your real condition in his sight, I know that you can perceive such flaws in your past life,—such black sins,—so many of them,—such departures of heart from God,—that you dare no more trust your soul's salvation upon your past action than you would trust yourself over the mouth of a pit swinging by a spider's web. You know better than to do such a thing as that; your past life is so deeply stained with sin that you know you must be washed from it in the precious blood of Jesus, or, otherwise, you must certainly perish.

No, your past life cannot avail for your salvation. And suppose it is suggested that you should trust *your future resolves*, will they save you? If you make a good resolution to-night, as strong as you can possibly make it; will that give you a good ground of hope? No, my dear friends, you know it will not, for you have made very strong resolutions before, and they have all been in vain. You have bound the Samson within you with green withs and new ropes, and I know not what besides, but he has gone outside, and shaken himself, and burst your bonds, and once again you have seen that the strong man has not been overcome. I would give nothing at all for the resolutions that you make in your own strength; they do but increase your sins, because they are simply further specimens of your presumptuous self-confidence. But, my dear friend, you know better, do you not, than to trust to your own resolutions? You really wish to be saved, and you know in your own self that it would only be a mockery if you were to rely upon your own principles, and resolutions, and things of that sort. Why, in yourself, you are as weak as water; have you not proved, by painful experiments again and again, that in you, that is, in your flesh, there dwelleth no good thing? Come, then; escape from that refuge of lies, and go to Jesus; wait upon God because you cannot go anywhere else for salvation.

There is no salvation to be obtained from *priests, or forms and ceremonies.* There is a gentleman over there who beckons you to come to him; I know him well; Mr. Priestcraft is his name. He

says that he has power to ease men of their burdens, that by some charmed incantation he can give them absolution. "Hi! presto!" he mutters his formula, and away goes the sin, and the sinner is as white as snow! Oh, yes! I know all about his tricks. I have seen quacks, in the street, selling their medicine to fools; and so, doubtless, there are fools that rely upon the word of quacks in churches, cathedrals, and the like; but "none of them can by any means redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom for him." Of all the monstrous lies which show the impossibility of human civilization giving common sense, not to say religion, to men, one of the grossest is this lie of pretended priestly power. I charge you, go not to that man; he will take your money, but he will leave you worse off than you were before. There is forgiveness—there is mercy—to be obtained from God, through Jesus Christ; but he has not given to any man the power to forgive sins. He says to me, and to all his servants, that we may proclaim forgiveness of sins to those who repent; and we do so, and God will prove that the proclamation is true; but, if sinners look to us, or to priests, or to any mortal men, to find forgiveness in them, they will look in vain. Turn not thither, I implore you; take your eyes off the priests of Rome, and the priests of Baal, look away to Christ alone, and say, "I will wait upon God; I can do no other if I would find salvation." Do as the poor monk did who, after living a life of asceticism, at last came to die. In his cell, he had found a copy of the Scriptures, which he had read to such good purpose that, when the so-called "sacraments" were brought to him, he waved them on one side, and was heard to say, "*Tua vulnera, Jésu! Tua vulnera, Jésu!*"—"Thy wounds, Jesus! Thy wounds, Jesus!" Ah! that is the remedy for human sin, and there is none other. "Therefore we will wait upon thee, O Lord! If there were some other fountain of grace, we might, perhaps, leave thee to go and seek it; but we know that there is none. These priests are of no use to us; we have been to these broken cisterns, and found no water of life there; therefore will we come to thee." O come, men and brethren, and wait thus upon the Lord!

All of you must know that there is no salvation anywhere but in Christ Jesus; but suppose any one of you were to say, "Yes, I know that; neither will I seek salvation anywhere else, but I will brave the matter out. I will never yield to God; I will die game." Ah! but can you do as you say? And if you could, what would be the good of it? There will come a time when that strong frame of yours will be as weak as a rush, and you will talk very differently then. I, too, have known what physical vigour and strength mean, but it is not many weeks ago that I knew what it was to be more trembling than an infant; I seemed to feel as if life were not worth the having so great was my pain of body and heaviness of heart. And such times may come to you big burly men, and you strong-minded women may feel the same; and then you will begin to tremble. As great Cæsar, when the fit was on him, whined like a sick child, so, many of your braggadocios are the very men who tremble most when they come to die. Ah! and when God, the

Judge of all, lays hold of you in the world to come, though your bones were iron and your sinews brass, you will tremble in every joint. Belshazzar only saw the "fingers of a man's hand" that wrote upon the wall of his palace, in letters of fire, "Thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting;" and, though he knew not the meaning of the mystic characters, "the king's countenance was changed, and his thoughts troubled him, so that the joints of his loins were loosed, and his knees smote one against another." There he sat, a shivering coward; but what will he do who sees God's hand, by-and-by, not writing on the wall, but lifted up to deal a blow that shall break him in pieces, as the potter's vessels are broken with a rod of iron?

"Now consider this, ye that forget God," says he, "lest I tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver." Those are not my words; I dare not say such terrible things on my own account; but they are the warning words of the God of love; and if infinite love speaks like that, you ought to give heed to what is said. There is a weight of emphasis about this message that my voice cannot convey; let me utter it again, with sorrowful and heartfelt earnestness, imploring you never to run the risk of knowing what these dreadful words means: "Consider this, ye that forget God,"—not merely you that blaspheme, but you that forget him, and do not think of him,—“Consider this, ye that forget God, lest I tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver.” God grant that you may not try to brazen it out with him, for you cannot do so, it is impossible!

“Ye sinners, seek his grace,
Whose wrath ye cannot bear;
Fly to the shelter of his cross,
And find salvation there.”

“But,” says someone, “I do not believe in any future state.” Well, friend, suppose it should happen to be as you wish, have you any advantage over me even then? Suppose that, after all, there should be no future state, I am as well off as you are; if there should be no hell, and no heaven, I am as well off as you are. But if there is a future state, if there is a hell, and there is a heaven, where will you be then? Remember that, to disbelieve is not the same thing as to disprove; and I, for one, feel certain that, as surely as thou livest, there is a future state, and there is a God who will judge thee; and thine unbelief cannot postpone the dread assize. The ostrich hides his head in the sand,—I know the simile is hackneyed, but I can think of no better one just now,—and when he sees not the hunter, he persuades himself that he has escaped from danger; but do you imagine that, because you refuse to believe the Scriptures, that they will be altered to please you? That can never be; but if you will not believe, I suppose you must go on sinning until you find out the truth, and have to cry, in the agony of despair, “Now it is too late.” The Lord grant that it may not be so; but, because it is true, therefore wait upon God now, for there is no hope anywhere else.

Exposition by C. H. Spurgeon.

JEREMIAH XIV.

In some respects, Jeremiah is one of the greatest of the ancient prophets, for he had a most sorrowful task to perform. He had not to deliver a message full of Evangelical comfort, like that of Isaiah; nor had he gorgeous visions of coming kingdoms, as Ezekiel had; but he was the Cassandra of his age. Jeremiah spoke the truth, yet few believed him; his life was spent in sighing over a wicked people who rejected and despised him. He bore a heavy burden upon his heart, and tears continually bedewed his cheeks, so that he was rightly called "the weeping prophet." This chapter gives us an illustration of the style in which he used to pray.

Verse 1. *The word of the LORD that came to Jeremiah concerning the dearth.*

There had been no rain, so the crops had failed, and there was a famine in the land. Jeremiah describes that famine in striking poetic imagery.

2—6. *Judah mourneth, and the gates thereof languish; they are black unto the ground; and the cry of Jerusalem is gone up. And their nobles have sent their little ones to the waters: they came to the pits, and found no water; they returned with their vessels empty; they were ashamed and confounded, and covered their heads. Because the ground is chapt, for there was no rain in the earth, the plowmen were ashamed, they covered their heads. Yea, the hind also calved in the field, and forsook it, because there was no grass. And the wild asses did stand in the high places, they snuffed up the wind like dragons; their eyes did fail, because there was no grass.*

The distress in the land was so great that the city gates, where, in more prosperous times, business transactions took place, and meetings of the people were held, were deserted. There was nothing that could be done while the nation was in such sorrow, and a great cry of agony went up from the capital of the country: "The cry of Jerusalem is gone up."

The highest in the land sent their children to hunt even for a little water to drink; they went to the cisterns where some might have been expected to remain, but they found none: "they returned with their vessels empty; they were ashamed and confounded, and covered their heads." The covering of the head was the sign of sorrow. You remember how, in the day of his distress, "David went up by the ascent of Mount Olivet, and wept as he went up, and had his head covered;" "and all the people that was with him covered every man his head, and they went up, weeping as they went up."

The ground had been reduced, by the drought, to such a state of hardness that it was useless to plough it, for there was no hope of any harvest coming. Even the wild creatures of the field shared the general suffering. The hind, which is reckoned by the Orientals to be the fondest of its young, forsook its fawn, and left it to perish, because there was no food. And the wild asses, which are able to endure thirst better than other creatures can, and are always quick to perceive water if there is any to be found, tried in vain to scent it anywhere. "They snuffed up the wind like dragons,"—like cobras, or serpents, or jackals, as the word may be variously rendered,—but they snuffed in vain; and their eyes became like coals in their head: they "did fail, because there was no grass." What then? Why, the prophet turns to prayer as the only means of obtaining relief.

7. *O LORD, though our iniquities testify against us, do thou it for thy name's sake:*

"Thou canst not do it because of any merit of ours."

7-9. *For our backslidings are many; we have sinned against thee. O the hope of Israel, the saviour thereof in time of trouble, why shouldst thou be as a stranger in the land, and as a wayfaring man that turneth aside to tarry for a night? Why shouldst thou be as a man astonied, as a mighty man that cannot save? yet thou, O LORD, art in the midst of us, and we are called by thy name; leave us not.*

Can you not almost hear the good man praying? Notice how he begs the Lord not to be to the land like a mere stranger who passes through it, and cares nothing for it. "Why shouldst thou be as a stranger in the land, and as a wayfaring man that turneth aside to tarry for a night?" Then he pleads with the Lord, "Why shouldst thou be as a man strong, but stunned?"—for that is the meaning of the expression he uses,—“Be not thou as a mighty man astounded or stunned, who cannot save us; let it not be thought or said that we have come to such a pass that even thou canst not help us.”

This was grand pleading on the prophet's part, and he followed it up by mentioning the close connection that existed between Israel and God: "Yet thou, O Jehovah, art in the midst of us, and we are called by thy name;" and then pleaded, "leave us not." It was a grand prayer; yet, at first, this was the only answer that Jeremiah received to it:—

10, 11. *Thus saith the LORD unto this people, Thus have they loved to wander, they have not refrained their feet, therefore the LORD doth not accept them; he will now remember their iniquity, and visit their sins. Then said the LORD unto me, Pray not for this people for their good.*

"You may pray, if you like to do so, for a plague to come upon them as a chastisement for their sins, but do not pray for any blessing for them."

12. *When they fast, I will not hear their cry; and when they offer burnt offering and an oblation, I will not accept them: but I will consume them by the sword, and by the famine, and by the pestilence.*

After being long provoked, God at last determines that he will punish the rebellious nation, and he seems, as it were, to put Jeremiah on one side, and to say, "I will not hear either you or them. I will listen to no pleading on their behalf; I have had patience with them too long already; now the day of my vengeance has come, and I will show no more mercy to them."

Now note what Jeremiah does even after the Lord has said to him, "Pray not for this people for their good."

13. *Then said I, Ah, Lord GOD! behold, the prophets say unto them, Ye shall not see the sword, neither shall ye have famine; but I will give you assured peace in this place.*

He says, "Lord, have pity on the people, for they are misled by their prophets. Peradventure, if these false prophets had not thus deceived them, and puffed them up, they would not have been so hardened in their sin." He tried to make some excuse for them, but the Lord would not yield to his pleading.

14, 15. *Then the LORD said unto me, The prophets prophesy lies in my name: I sent them not, neither have I commanded them, neither spake unto them: they prophesy unto you a false vision and divination, and a thing of nought, and the deceit of their heart. Therefore thus saith the LORD concerning the prophets that prophesy in my name, and I sent them not, yet they say, Sword and famine shall not be in this land; By sword and famine shall those prophets be consumed.*

God says, "Yes, I will deal with the false prophets; it is true that they have misled the people, and I will punish them for their deception; but I will not excuse the people even on that ground."

16. *And the people to whom they prophesy shall be cast out in the streets of Jerusalem because of the famine and the sword; and they shall have none to bury them, them, their wives, nor their sons, nor their daughters: for I will pour their wickedness upon them.*

That seems to be a hard answer to Jeremiah's pleading; what is the prophet to do now? God gives him another message to deliver to the people:—

17, 18. *Therefore thou shalt say this word unto them; Let mine eyes run down with tears night and day, and let them not cease: for the virgin daughter of my people is broken with a great breach, with a very grievous blow. If I go forth into the field, then behold the slain with the sword! and if I enter into the city, then behold them that are sick with famine! yea, both the prophet and the priest go about into a land that they know not.*

So God told Jeremiah that he might go and tell the people that he would weep continually for them. The faithful and sympathetic prophet was to be allowed constantly to shed tears on their behalf, and to feel great distress of soul because everywhere he saw signs of the heavy hand of God resting upon the guilty people. If they went outside the city, the Chaldeans slew them with the sword; and if they stopped inside, they perished by famine; or those that died not were carried away captive into a land that they knew not. What is Jeremiah to do in such a case as this? He is told that he must not pray for the people, and God seems determined to smite them. What can love do when even the gates of prayer are ordered to be closed? Notice how, after he is told that he must not pray, he edges his way up towards the throne of grace, and, at last, he does what he is told not to do. He begins thus:—

19. *Hast thou utterly rejected Judah? hath thy soul loathed Zion? why hast thou smitten us, and there is no healing for us? we looked for peace, and there is no good; and for the time of healing, and behold trouble!*

That is not exactly praying, but it is very like it. Jeremiah is asking the Lord whether he can really have cast off his people.

20: *We acknowledge, O LORD, our wickedness, and the iniquity of our fathers: for we have sinned against thee.*

He has advanced a step farther now, to the confession of sin. If that is not really prayer, it always goes with it. It is the background of prayer, so we shall soon have some other touches in the picture.

21. *Do not abhor us for thy name's sake, do not disgrace the throne of thy glory: remember, break not thy covenant with us.*

Now he is getting actually to praying; he cannot help himself. He is told that he must not pray, but he feels that he must; he loves the people so much that he must plead for them.

22. *Are there any among the vanities of the Gentiles that can cause rain? or can the heavens give showers? art not thou he, O LORD our God? therefore we will wait upon thee: for thou hast made all these things.*

O splendid perseverance of importunity,—strong resolve of a forbidden intercession! “Thou, O Lord our God, tellest us not to pray, but we cannot restrain our supplication: ‘Therefore we will wait upon thee.’”

God help us all to wait upon him! We are not so discouraged from praying as he was who spoke these words, so there is still more reason why we should say to the Lord, “Therefore we will wait upon thee.”