

THE POWER OF PRAYER AND THE PLEASURE OF PRAISE

NO. 507

A SERMON
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*“Ye also helping together by prayer for us,
 that for the gift bestowed upon us by the means of many persons thanks may be given by many on our behalf.
 For our rejoicing in this, the testimony of our conscience,
 that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God,
 we have had our conversation in the world, and more abundantly to you-ward.”*
 2 Corinthians 1:11-12

THE apostle Paul had, by singular providences, been delivered from imminent peril in Asia. During the great riot at Ephesus, when Demetrius and his fellow shrine-makers raised a great tumult against him, because they saw that their craft was in danger, Paul's life was greatly in jeopardy, so that he writes, “We were pressed out of measure, above strength, insomuch that we despaired even of life.” The apostle attributes to God alone his singular preservation, and if he referred also to the occasion when he was stoned and left for dead, there is much appropriateness in his blessing, “God which raised the dead.”

The apostle, moreover, argues from the fact that God had thus delivered him in the past, and was still his helper in the present, that He would be with him also in the future. Paul is a master at all arithmetic, his faith was always a ready-reckoner. We here find him computing by the believer's *Rule of Three*. He argues from the past to the present and from the present to things yet to come. The verse preceding our text is a brilliant example of this arriving at a comfortable conclusion by the *Rule of Three*, “Who delivered us from so great a death, and doth deliver: in whom we trust that he will yet deliver us.”

Because our God is “the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever,” His love in time past is an infallible assurance of His kindness today, and an equally certain pledge of His faithfulness on the morrow. Whatever our circumstances may be, however perplexed may be our pathway, and however dark our horizon, if we argue by the rule of, “He has, He does, He will,” our comfort can never be destroyed.

Courage, then, O you afflicted seed of Israel. If you had a changeable God to deal with, your souls might be full of bitterness, but because He is, “the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever,” every repeated manifestation of His grace should make it more easy for you to rest upon Him. Every renewed experience of His fidelity should confirm your confidence in His grace. May the most blessed Spirit teach us to grow in holy confidence in our ever-faithful Lord.

Although our apostle thus acknowledged God's hand, and God's hand alone, in his deliverance, yet he was not so foolish as to deny or undervalue the second causes. On the contrary, having first praised the God of all comfort, he now remembers with gratitude the earnest prayers of the many loving intercessors. Gratitude to God must never become an excuse for ingratitude to man.

It is true that JEHOVAH shielded the apostle of the Gentiles, but He did it in answer to prayer. The chosen vessel was not broken by the rod of the wicked, for the out-stretched hand of the God of heaven was his defense, but that hand was outstretched because the people of Corinth and the saints of God everywhere had prevailed at the throne of grace by their united supplications.

With gratitude, those successful pleadings are mentioned in the text, “Ye also helping together by prayer for us,” and he desires the brethren now to unite their praises with his, “that for the gift bestowed upon us by the means of many persons thanks may be given by many on our behalf,” for he adds that he has a claim upon their love, since he was not as some who were unfaithful to their trust, but his conscience was clear that he had preached the Word simply and with sincerity.

While speaking upon these topics, may the anointing Spirit now descend to make them profitable to us. We shall, first, *acknowledge the power of united prayer*. Secondly, *excite you to united praise*, and then, in the third place, *urge our joyful claim upon you—a claim which is not ours alone, but belongs to all ministers of God who in sincerity labor for souls*.

I. First, then, dear friends, it is my duty and my privilege this morning to ACKNOWLEDGE THE POWER OF UNITED PRAYER.

It has pleased God to make prayer the abounding and rejoicing river through which most of our choice mercies flow to us. It is the golden key which unlocks the well-stored granaries of our heavenly Joseph. It is written upon each of the mercies of the covenant, “For this will I be inquired of by the house of Israel to do it for them.” There are mercies which come unsought, for God is found of them that sought not for Him. But there are other favors which are only bestowed upon the men who ask, and therefore receive—who seek, and therefore find—who knock, and therefore gain an entrance.

Why God has been pleased to command us to pray at all it is not difficult to discover, for prayer *glorifies God*, by putting man in the humblest posture of worship. The creature in prayer acknowledges his Creator with reverence, and confesses Him to be the giver of every good and perfect gift. The eye is lifted up to behold the glory of the Lord, while the knee is bent to the earth in the lowliness of acknowledged weakness. Though prayer is not the highest mode of adoration, or otherwise it would be continued by the saints in heaven, yet it is the most humble, and so the most fitting to set forth the glory of the perfect One as it is beheld by imperfect flesh and blood.

From the “Our Father,” in which we claim relationship, right on to, “the kingdom, and the power, and the glory,” which we ascribe to the only true God, every sentence of prayer honors the Most High. The groans and tears of humble petitioners are as truly acceptable as the continual, “Holy, holy, holy,” of the Cherubim and Seraphim, for in their very essence, all truthful confessions of personal fault are but a homage paid to the infinite perfections of the Lord of hosts. More honored is the Lord by our prayers than by the unceasing smoke of the holy incense of the altar which stood before the veil.

Moreover, the act of prayer *teaches us our unworthiness*, which is no small blessing to such proud beings as we are. If God gave us favors without constraining us to pray for them, we should never know how poor we are, but a true prayer is an inventory of wants, a catalog of necessities, a suit *in forma pauperis*, an exposure of secret wounds, a revelation of hidden poverty.

While it is an application to divine wealth, it is a confession of human emptiness. I believe that the most healthy state of a Christian is to be always empty, and always depending upon the Lord for supplies; to be always poor in self and rich in Jesus; weak as water personally, but mighty through God to do great exploits; and hence the use of prayer, because while it adores God, it lays the creature where he should be, in the very dust.

Prayer is in itself, apart from the answer which it brings, a great benefit to the Christian. As the runner gains strength for the race by daily exercise, so for the great race of life, we acquire energy by the hallowed labor of prayer. Prayer plumes the wings of God’s young eaglets that they may learn to mount above the clouds. Prayer girds the loins of God’s warriors, and sends them forth to combat with their sinews braced and their muscles firm.

An earnest pleader comes out of his closet, even as the sun rises from the chambers of the east, rejoicing like a strong man to run his race. Prayer is that uplifted hand of Moses which routs the Amalekites more than the sword of Joshua. It is the arrow shot from the chamber of the prophet foreboding defeat to the Syrians.

What if I say that prayer clothes the believer with the attributes of deity, girds human weakness with divine strength, turns human folly into heavenly wisdom, and gives to troubled mortals the serenity of the immortal God? I know not what prayer cannot do! I thank You, great God, for the mercy seat, a choice gift of Your marvelous lovingkindness. Help us to use it aright!

As many mercies are conveyed from heaven in the ship of prayer, so *there are many choice and special favors which can only be brought to us by the fleets of united prayer*. Many are the good things

which God will give to His lonely Elijahs and Daniels, but if two of you agree as touching anything that you shall ask, there is no limit to God's bountiful answers. Peter might never have been brought out of prison if it had not been that prayer was made without ceasing by *all* the church for him.

Pentecost might never have come if *all* the disciples had not been "with one accord in one place," waiting for the descent of the tongues of fire. God is pleased to give many mercies to one pleader, but at times He seems to say, "You shall all appear before Me and entreat My favor, for I will not see your face unless even your younger brethren be with you."

Why is this, dear friends? I take it that thus our gracious Lord sets forth His own esteem for the communion of saints. "I believe in the communion of saints" is one article of the great Christian creed, but how few there are who understand it. Oh! there is such a thing as real union among God's people. We may be called by different names,

***"But all the servants of our King
In heaven and earth are one."***

We cannot afford to lose the help and love of our brethren. Augustine says, "The poor are made for the rich and the rich are made for the poor." I do not doubt but that strong saints are made for weak saints, and that the weak saints bring special benedictions upon the full-grown believers. There is a fitness in the whole body, each joint owes something to every other, and the whole body is bound together and compacted by that which every joint supplies.

There are certain glands in the human body which the anatomist hardly understands. He can say of the liver, for instance, that it yields a very valuable fluid of the utmost value in the bodily economy, but there are other secretions whose distinct value he cannot ascertain. Yet, doubtless, if that gland were removed, the whole body might suffer to a high degree.

And so, beloved friends, there may be some believers of whom we may say, "I do not know the use of them. I cannot tell what good that Christian does." Yet were that insignificant, and apparently useless member removed, the whole body might be made to suffer, the whole frame might become sick, and the whole heart faint. This is probably the reason why many a weighty gift of heaven's love is only granted to combined petitioning—that we may perceive the use of the whole body, and so may be compelled to recognize the real vital union which divine grace has made and daily maintains among the people of God.

Is it not a happy thought, dear friends, that the very poorest and most obscure church member can add something to the body's strength. We cannot all preach. We cannot all rule. We cannot all give gold and silver, but we can all contribute our prayers. There is no convert, though he is but two or three days old in grace, but can pray. There is no bed-ridden sister in Jesus who cannot pray. There is no sick, aged, imbecile, obscure, illiterate, or penniless believer, who cannot add his supplications to the general stock. This is the church's riches.

We put boxes at the door that we may receive your offerings to God's cause—remember there is a spiritual chest within the church into which we should all drop our loving intercessions, as into the treasury of the Lord. Even the widow, without her two mites, can give her offering to this treasury. See, then, dear friends, what union and communion there are among the people of God, since there are certain mercies which are only bestowed while the saints unitedly pray.

How we ought to feel this bond of union! How we ought to pray for one another! How, as often as the church meets together for supplication, should we all make it our bounden duty to be there! I would that some of you who are absent from the prayer meeting upon any little excuse would reflect how much you rob us all. The prayer meeting is an invaluable institution, ministering strength to all other meetings and agencies.

Are there not many of you who might, by a little pinching of your time and pressing of your labors, come among us a little oftener? And what if you should lose a customer now and then, do you not think

that this loss could be well made up to you by your gains on other days? Or if not so, would not the spiritual profit much more than counterbalance any little temporal loss? “Not forgetting the assembling of yourselves together as the manner of some is.”

We are now prepared for a further observation. *This united prayer should specially be made for the ministers of God.* It is for them peculiarly that this public prayer is intended. Paul asks for it, “Brethren, pray for us.” And all God’s ministers to the latest time will ever confess that this is the secret source of their strength. The prayers of the people must be the might of the ministers.

Shall I try to show you why the minister more than any other man in the church needs the earnest prayers of the people? Is not *his position the most perilous*? Satan’s orders to the hosts of hell are, “Fight neither with small nor great, but only with the ministers of God.” He knows if he can once smite through the heart of one of these, there will be a general confusion, for if the champion be dead, then the people fly.

It is around the standard-bearer that the fight is thickest. There the battle-axes ring upon the helmets. There the arrows are bent upon the armor, for the foeman knows that if he can cut down the standard, or cleave the skull of its bearer, he will strike a heavy blow and cause deep discouragement. Press around us, then, you men at arms! Knights of the red cross, rally for our defense, for the fight grows hot. We beseech you, if you elect us to the office of the ministry, stand fast at our side in our hourly conflicts.

I noticed on returning from Rotterdam, when we were crossing the bar at the mouth of the Maas, where by reason of a deep tide and a bad wind, the navigation was exceedingly dangerous, that orders were issued, “All hands on deck!” So methinks the life of a minister is so perilous, that I may well cry, “All hands on deck,” every man to prayer. Let even the weakest saint become instant in supplication.

The minister, standing in such a perilous position, has, moreover, *a solemn weight of responsibility resting on him.* Every man should be his brother’s keeper in a measure, but woe to the watchmen of God if they be not faithful, for at their hands shall the blood of souls be required. At their door shall God lay the ruin of men if they preach not the Gospel fully and faithfully. There are times when this burden of the Lord weighs upon God’s ministers until they cry out in pain as if their hearts would burst with anguish.

I marked the captain as we crossed that bar throwing the lead himself into the sea, and when one asked why he did not let the sailors do it, he said, “At this point, just now, I dare not trust any man but myself to heave the lead, for we have hardly six inches between our ship and the bottom.” And indeed, we felt the vessel touch once or twice most unpleasantly.

So there will come times with every preacher of the Gospel, if he be what he should be, when he will be in dread suspense for his hearers and will not be able to discharge his duty by proxy, but must personally labor for men, not even trusting himself to preach, but calling upon his God for help since he is now overwhelmed with the burden of men’s souls. Oh, do pray for us. If God gives us to you, and if you accept the gift most cheerfully, do not so despise both God and us as to leave us penniless and poverty-stricken because your prayers are withheld.

Moreover, the preservation of the minister *is one of the most important objects to the church.* You may lose a sailor from the ship, and that is very bad, both for him and for you. But if the pilot should fall over, or the captain should be smitten with sickness, or the helmsman be washed from the wheel, then what is the vessel to do? Therefore, though prayer is to be put up for every other person in the church, yet for the minister is it to be offered first and foremost, because of the position which he occupies.

And then, *how much more is asked of him than of you?* If you are to keep a private table for individual instruction, he is, as it were, to keep a public table, a feast of good things for all comers, and how shall he do this unless his Master gives him rich provisions? You are to shine as a candle in a house, the minister has to be as a lighthouse to be seen far across the deep, and how shall he shine the whole night long unless he be trimmed by his Master, and fresh oil be given him from heaven?

His influence is wider than yours. If it be for evil, he shall be a deadly upas, with spreading boughs poisoning all beneath his shadow. But if God make him a star in His right hand, his ray of light shall

cheer with its genial influence whole nations and whole periods of time. If there be any truth in all this, I implore you yield us generously and constantly the assistance of your prayers.

I find that in the original, the word for “helping together,” implies very earnest WORK. Some people’s prayers have no work in them, but the only prayer which prevails with God is a real working-man’s prayer—where the petitioner, like a Samson, shakes the gates of mercy and labors to pull them up rather than be denied an entrance. We do not want finger-end prayers, which only touch the burden, we need shoulder-prayers, which bear a load of earnestness and are not to be denied their desire.

We do not want those dainty run-away knocks at the door of mercy, which professors give when they show off at prayer meetings, but we ask for the knocking of a man who means to have, and means to stop at mercy’s gate till it opens and all his need shall be supplied. The energetic, vehement violence of the man who is not to be denied, but intends to carry heaven by storm until he wins his heart’s desire—this is the prayer which ministers covet of their people.

Melancthon, it is said, derived great comfort from the information that certain poor weavers, women and children, had met together to pray for the Reformation. Yes, Melancthon, there was solid ground for comfort here. Depend on it, it was not Luther only, but the thousands of poor persons who sung psalms at the plough-tail, and the hundreds of serving men and women who offered supplications, that made the Reformation what it was.

We are told of Paulus Phagius, a celebrated Hebrew scholar, very useful in introducing the Reformation into this country, that one of his frequent requests of his younger scholars was that they would continue in prayer, so that God might be pleased to pour out a blessing in answer to them. Have I not said a hundred times that all the blessing that God has given us here, all the increase to our church, has been due, under God, to your earnest, fervent supplications?

There have been heaven-moving seasons both in this house and at New Park Street. We have had times when we have felt we could die sooner than not be heard, when we carried our church on our bosom as a mother carries her child, when we felt a yearning and a travailing in birth for the souls of men. “What hath God wrought?” we may truly say, when we see our church daily increasing, and the multitudes still hanging upon our lips to listen to the Word.

Shall we now cease from our prayers? Shall we now say unto the Great High Priest, “It is enough”? Shall we now pluck the glowing coals from the altar and quench the burning incense? Shall we now refuse to bring the morning and evening lambs of prayer and praise to the sacrifice?

O children of Ephraim, being armed and carrying bows, will you turn your backs in the day of battle? The flood is divided before you, the Jordan is driven back. Will you refuse to march through the depths? God, even your God, goes up before you. The shout of a King is heard in the midst of your hosts. Will you now be recreant and refuse to go up and possess the land? Will you now lose your first love? Shall “Ichabod” be written upon the forefront of this tabernacle? Shall it be said that God has forsaken you? Shall the day come in which the daughters of Philistia shall rejoice and the sons of Syria shall triumph?

If not, to your knees again, with all the force of prayer! If not, to your vehement supplications once more! If not, if you would not see good blighted and evil triumphant, clasp hands again, and in the name of Him who ever lives to intercede, once more be prevalent in prayer that the blessing may again descend. “Ye also helping together by prayer for us.”

II. We must now EXCITE YOU TO PRAISE.

Praise should always follow answered prayer. The mist of earth’s gratitude should rise as the sun of heaven’s love warms the ground. Has the Lord been gracious to you and inclined His ear to the voice of your supplication? Then praise Him as long as you live. Deny not a song to Him who has answered your prayer and given you the desire of your heart.

To be silent over God’s mercies is to incur the guilt of shocking ingratitude, and ingratitude is one of the worst of crimes. I trust, dear friends, you will not act as basely as the nine lepers, who after they had been healed of their leprosy, returned not to give thanks unto the healing Lord.

To forget to praise God is to refuse to benefit ourselves, for praise, like prayer, is exceedingly useful to the spiritual man. It is a high and healthful exercise. To dance, like David, before the Lord, is to quicken the blood in the veins and make the pulse beat at a healthier rate. Praise gives to us a great feast, like that of Solomon, who gave to every man a good piece of flesh and a flagon of wine. Praise is the most heavenly of Christian duties.

The angels pray not, but they cease not to praise both day and night. To bless God for mercies received is to benefit our fellow men, "The humble shall hear thereof and be glad." Others who have been in like circumstances shall take comfort if we can say, "Oh! magnify the LORD with me, and let us exalt his name together; this poor man cried, and the LORD heard him."

Tongue-tied Christians are a sad dishonor to the church. We have some such, some whom the devil has gagged, and the loudest music they ever make is when they are champing the bit of their silence. I would, my brethren, that in all such cases the tongue of the dumb may sing.

To go a step further here. As praise is good and pleasant, blessing man and glorifying God, *united praise has a very special commendation*. United praise is like music in concert. The sound of one instrument is exceedingly sweet, but when hundreds of instruments, both wind and stringed, are all combined, then the orchestra sends forth a noble volume of harmony.

The praise of one Christian is accepted before God like a grain of incense, but the praise of many is like a censor full of frankincense smoking up before the Lord. Combined praise is an anticipation of heaven, for in that general assembly they together with one heart and voice, praise the Lord.

*"Ten thousand thousand are their tongues,
But all their joys are one."*

Public praise is very agreeable to the Christian himself. How many burdens has it removed. I am sure when I hear the shout of praise in this house it warms my heart. It is at times a little too slow for my taste, and I must urge you to quicken your pace, that the rolling waves of majestic praise may display their full force. Yet with all drawbacks to my heart, there is no music like yours.

My Dutch friends praise the Lord so very slowly that one might very well go to sleep, lulled by their lengthened strains. Even there, however, the many voices make a grand harmony of praise. I love to hear God's people sing when they really do sing, not when it is a *drawing* out somewhere between harmony and discord. O for a sacred song, a shout of lofty praise in which every man's soul beats the time, and every man's tongue sounds the tune, and each singer feels a high ambition to excel his fellow in gratitude and love.

There is something exceedingly delightful in the union of true hearts in the worship of God, and when these hearts are expressed in song, how sweet the charming sounds. I think we ought to have a praise meeting once a week. We have a prayer meeting every Monday, and a prayer meeting every Saturday, and a prayer meeting every morning, but why do we not have a *praise meeting*? Surely seasons should be set apart for services made up of praise from beginning to end. Let us try the plan at once.

As I said about united prayer, that it should be offered especially for ministers, *so should united praise often take the same aspect*. The whole company should praise and bless God for the mercy rendered to the church through its pastors. Hear how our apostle puts it again, "That for the gift bestowed upon us by the means of many persons, thanks may be given by many on our behalf." Brethren, we ought to praise God for good ministers *that they live*, for when they die much of their work dies with them.

It is astonishing how a reformation will press on while Luther and Calvin live and how it will cease directly the reformers die. The spirits of good men are immortal only in a sense. The churches of God in this age are like the Israelites in the times of the judges, when the judges died they went after graven images again. And it is so now. While God spares the man the church prospers, but when the man dies

the zeal which he blew to a flame smolders among the ashes. In nine cases out of ten, if not in ninety-nine out of every hundred, the prosperity of a church rests on the minister's life. God so ordains it to humble us.

There should be gratitude, then, for spared life, but there should be great gratitude for *preserved character*, for oh! when a minister falls, what a disgrace it is! Why, when you read in the police reports the sad case of the Rev. Mr. _____, who chose to call himself a Baptist minister, everybody says, "What a shocking thing! What a bad set the Baptists must be."

Now, any fool in the world may call himself a Baptist minister. Our liberty is so complete that no law or order exists. Any man who can get a dozen to hear him is a minister, at least to them. Therefore you cannot suppose but what there will be some hypocrites who will take the name in order to get some sort of reputation.

If the true minister be kept, and made to hold fast his integrity, there should be constant gratitude to God on his behalf. If the minister be kept *well-supplied with goodly matter*, if he be like a springing well, if God give him to bring out of His treasury things both new and old to feed His people, there should be hearty thanks.

And if he be kept *sound*, if he goes not aside to philosophy on the one hand, nor to a narrowness of doctrine on the other, there should be thanksgiving there. If God gives to the masses the will to hear him, and above all, if souls are converted and saints be edified, there should be never-ceasing honor and praise to God.

Ah! I am talking now about what you all know, and you just nod your heads to it, and think there is not much in it, but if you were made to live in Holland for a little time you would soon appreciate these remarks. While traveling there, I stayed in houses with godly men, men of God with whom I could hold sweet communion, who cannot attend what was once their place of worship.

Why not? "Sir," they say, "can I go to a place of worship when the most of the ministers deny every word of Scripture? Not those of the Reformed Church only, but of every sect in Holland. How can I listen to the traitors who swear to the Calvinistic or Lutheran articles, and then go into the pulpit and deny the reality of the resurrection or assert that the ascension of Jesus is a mere spiritual parable?"

I find that in the Netherlands they are fifty years in advance of us in infidelity. We shall soon catch up with them if gentlemen of a certain school I know of are suffered to multiply. The Dutch divines have taken great strides in Neologism, till now the people love the truth, and there are multitudes that are willing to hear it, but these are compelled absolutely to refuse to go to church at all, lest by any means they should give countenance to the heretical and false doctrines which are preached to them every Sabbath day.

Ah! if God were once to take away from England the ministers who preach the Gospel boldly and plainly, you would cry to God to give you the candlestick back again. We may indeed say of England,

"With all your faults I love thee still."

We have a colonial bishop who avows his unbelief. We have a few men of all denominations who are quietly sliding from the truth, but thank God they are nothing as of yet. They are but as a drop in a bucket compared to the churches of Christ, and those among us who are not quite as Calvinistic as we might wish, I thank God, never dispute the inspiration of Scripture, nor doubt the great truth of justification by faith. We have still preserved amongst us men that are faithful to God and preach the whole truth as it is in Jesus.

Be thankful for your ministers, I say again, for if you were placed where some believers are, you would cry out to your God, "Lord, send us back Your prophets. Send us a famine of bread or a famine of water, but send us not a famine of the Word of God!"

I ask for myself this morning, as your minister, your thanksgivings to be mingled with mine in praising God for the help which He has vouchsafed to me in the very arduous work of the last fortnight.

Praise be to God for the acceptance which He gave me in that country among all ranks of the people. I speak to His praise and not to mine, for this has been a vow with me, that if God will give me a harvest, I will not have an ear of corn of it, but He shall have it all.

I found in all the places where I went great multitudes of people, crowds who could not understand the preacher, but who wanted to see his face, because God had blessed his translated sermons to their souls. Multitudes who gave me the grip of brotherly kindness, and with tears in their eyes, invoked, in the Dutch language, every blessing upon my head.

I hoped to preach to some fifties and hundreds, and instead of that there were so many that the great cathedrals were not too large. This surprised me, and made me glad, and caused me to rejoice in God, and I ask you to rejoice with me. I thank God for the acceptance which He gave me among all ranks of the people.

While the poor crowded to shake hands, till they almost pulled me in pieces, it pleased God to move the heart of the Queen of Holland to send for me, and for an hour and a quarter, I was privileged to talk with her concerning the things which make for our peace. I sought no interview with her, but it was her own wish, and then I lifted up my soul to God that I might talk of nothing but Christ, and might preach to her of nothing but Jesus. And so it pleased the Master to help me, and I left that very amiable lady, not having shunned to declare the whole counsel of God.

Gratified was I, indeed, to find myself received cordially by all denominations, so that on the Saturday at Amsterdam, I preached in the Mennonite Church in the morning, and at the Old Dutch Reformed Church in the evening. The next Sunday morning, in the English Presbyterian Church, and then again in the evening in the Dutch Free Church.

Sometimes in the great cathedrals, as in the Dom Kirk at Utrecht, and in Peter's Kirk at Leyden, not having the poor only, but the nobility and the gentry of the land, who of course could understand English better than most of the poor, who have had no opportunity of learning it.

I felt while going from town to town the Master helping me continually to preach. I never knew such elasticity of spirit, such bounding of heart in my life before. And I come back, not wearied and tired, though preaching twice every day, but fuller of strength and vigor than when I first set out. I give God the glory for the many souls I have heard of who have been converted through the reading of the printed sermons, and for the loving blessings of those who followed us to the water's edge with many tears, saying to us, "Do thy diligence to come again before winter," and urging us once more to preach the Word in that land.

There may be mingled with this some touch of egotism, the Lord knows whether it be so or not, but I am not conscious of it. I do praise and bless His name, that in a land where there is so much philosophy, He has helped me to preach His truth so simply, that I never uttered a word as a mere doctrinalist, but I preached Christ, and nothing but Christ. Rejoice with me, my dear brethren. I must have you rejoice in it, or if you will not, I must rejoice alone, but my loaf of praise is too great for me to eat it all.

III. And we come to a close. I have to urge THE JOYFUL CLAIMS which the apostle gives in the twelfth verse, as a reason WHY THERE SHOULD BE PRAYER AND PRAISE.

"For our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world, and more abundantly to you-ward." Ah! after all, a man's comfort must come, next to the finished salvation of God, from the testimony of his own conscience.

And to a minister what a testimony it is that he has preached the Gospel in simplicity, to which there are two senses—preached it not with double-mindedness, saying one thing and meaning another. But preached it, not as watermen row, looking one way and pulling another, but preached it meaning what he said, having a single heart, desiring God's glory and the salvation of men.

And what a blessing to have preached it simply, that is to say, without hard words, without polished phrases, never studying elocutionary graces, never straining after oratorical embellishments. How accursed must be the life of a man who profanes the pulpit to the dignity of eloquence. How desperate

will be his deathbed when he remembers that he made an exhibition of his powers of speech rather than of the solid things which make for the winning of souls. That conscience may well be easy that can speak of having dealt with God's truth in simplicity.

The apostle says, also, that he had preached it with sincerity, that is, he had preached it meaning it, feeling it, preached it so that none could accuse him of being false. The Greek word has something in it of sunlight, and he is the true minister of God who preaches what he would wish to have hung up in the sunlight, or who has the sunlight shining right through him. I am afraid we are none of us like white glass, most of us are colored a little, but he is happy who seeks to get rid of the coloring matter as much as possible, so that the light of the Gospel may shine right straight, clear as it comes from the Sun of Righteousness, through him.

Paul had preached with simplicity and sincerity. And he adds, "Not with fleshly wisdom." Oh! what stories have I heard of what fleshly wisdom will do, and I have learned a lesson during the last fortnight which I would that England would learn. There are three schools of theological error over yonder, and each one leaps over the back of its fellow.

Some of them holding that all the facts of Scripture are only myths, others of them say that there are some good things in the Bible, though there are a great many mistakes, and others go further still, and flinging the whole Bible away altogether as to its inspiration, though they still preach it, and still lean on it, saying that they do that merely for the edification of the vulgar, merely holding it up for the sake of the masses, though I ought to add merely to get their living as well.

Sad! sad! sad! that the church has gone to such a length as that—the Old Dutch Reformed Church, the very mirror of Calvinism, standing fast and firm in its creeds to all the doctrines we love, and yet gone astray to latitudinarian and licentious liberty. Oh! how earnestly should we decry fleshly wisdom!

I am afraid, dear friends, that sometimes some of you, when you hear a minister, you like him to put it pretty well, and you find fault unless he shows some degree of talent. I wonder whether that is not a sin? I am half inclined to think it is.

I sometimes think whether we ought not to look less every day to talent, and more and more to the matter of the Gospel that is preached—whether if a man be blessed with elocutionary power we may perhaps be more profited by him—whether that is not a weakness, whether we had not better go back to the days of fishermen once again. And give men no sort of education whatever, but just send them to preach the truth simply, rather than go the length they are now going, giving men, I know not what, of all sorts of learning that is of no earthly use to them, but which only help them to pervert the simplicity of God. I love that word in my text, "Not with fleshly wisdom."

And now I lay my claim, as my conscience bears me witness—I lay my claim to this boasting of our apostle. I have preached God's Gospel in simplicity. I do not know how I can preach it more simply, nor can I more honestly declare it. I have preached it sincerely—the Searcher of all hearts knows that. And I have not preached it with fleshly wisdom, and that for one excellent reason—that I have not any and have been compelled to keep to the simple testimony of the Lord.

But if I have done aught, it has been done by the grace of God. If any success has been achieved, it has been grace that has done it all. "And more especially to you-ward," for though our word has gone forth to many lands, and our testimony belts the globe, yet "more especially to you-ward." You have we warned, you have we entreated, you have we exhorted, with you have we pleaded, over you have we wept, for you have we prayed. To some of you, we have been a spiritual parent in Christ. To many of you as a nursing father. To many of you as a teacher and an edifier in the Gospel. And we hope to all of you a sincere friend in Christ Jesus.

Therefore, do I claim your prayers—*yours* more than any other people's. And though there will be not a few who will remember us in their supplications, I do conjure *you*, inasmuch as it has been, "especially to you-ward," let me specially have your prayers. Some will say that it is unkind even for me to suppose that you do not pray. Well, I do not so suppose it out of unkindness, but there may be some who forget—some who forget to plead. Oh! do pray for us still!

The whole congregation is not saved yet. There are some who hear us who are not yet converted. Plead with God for their sakes. There are some hard hearts unbroken. Ask God to make the hammer strike, and while there are some still unmelted, pray God to make the Word like a fire. This great London needs to be stirred from end to end. Pray for all your ministers, that God may make them mighty. The church wants more still of the loud voice of God to wake it from its sleep. Ask God to bless all His sent servants. Plead with Him with divine energy, that so His kingdom may come, and His will may be done on earth as it is in heaven.

O that you all believed in Jesus. For until you do, you cannot pray nor praise! O that you all believed in Jesus! Remember, this is the only way of salvation. Trust Jesus, for he that believes on Him is not condemned, but he that believes not is condemned already, because he believes not on the Son of God. Trust Jesus and you shall be saved. May Christ accept you now, for His own love's sake. Amen.

Taken from The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit C. H. Spurgeon Collection. Only necessary changes have been made, such as correcting spelling errors, some punctuation usage, capitalization of deity pronouns, and minimal updating of a few archaic words. The content is unabridged. Additional Bible-based resources are available at www.spurgeongems.org.