



The Prayer-Hearing God

A Sermon By George Müller of Bristol

“Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you; for every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth, and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.” – Matt. vii. 7, 8.

Our Heavenly Father loves all His children with infinite love; that is, He loves every one, even the feeblest and weakest of his children, with the self-same love with which He loves His only begotten Son. On account of this infinite love – knowing how great, how many, how varied, nay how numberless would be their trials, their difficulties, their afflictions, their temptations, while passing through this vale of tears – He, in His grace, made abundant provision in giving most precious and encouraging promises concerning prayer; so that if they would take their trials, difficulties, afflictions and temptations to their Heavenly Father, seeking His strength, His counsel, and His guidance, and acting according to the loving counsel and advice given in the Scriptures – “Casting all your care upon Him” – the position of most of the children of God would be very different from what it is.

Then again, our precious Lord Jesus Christ loves us with the self-same love with which the Father loves Him. Do we all believe it?

The former statement, that the Father loves His children with the self-same love with which He loves His only begotten Son, and what I now state, that the Lord Jesus Christ loves us with the self-same love – that is, with infinite love – and that with this love He loves the feeblest and weakest of His children, possibly may appear strange to some of you. Yet this is the statement of Holy writ as found in the 9th verse of the 15th of John, and the 23rd verse of the 17th of John. Our precious Lord Jesus Christ who loves us with such love, passed through difficulties, trials, and temptations, like unto ours, while He was in this world. He was looked down upon; He was despised; that Blessed One “had not where to lay His head”; and was, while in this world, “in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.” Knowing the position of His disciples in this world, He has given the precious promise which I have read on the subject of prayer, and if it is made good use of, we may have Him as the burden-bearer, ever ready to help in time of sorrow, weakness and affliction - in a word, in all the variety of position and circumstances in which we are found here in the body.

Had it been left to us to make promises regarding prayer, I do not know that you or I could have done more than say, “Ask, and ye shall receive.” Yet, while the promise is so full, so deep, so broad, so precious in every way, we have here – as becomes us with other parts of the Word of God – to compare Scripture, with Scripture, because in other parts additions are made, or conditions given, which, if we neglect, will hinder our getting the full benefit of prayer. I judge we have not to lose sight of the passage in I John, 5th chapter, 14th to 15th verses – “These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God. And this is the confidence we have in Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He heareth us: and if we know that He hears us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of Him.”

Here is the first point specially to be noticed regarding prayer – “If we ask anything according to His will He heareth us, and if we know that he hears us, whatsoever we ask we know that we have the petitions that we desired of Him.” If, therefore, we pray, and desire to have our petitions granted, it becomes us first to see to it that we ask for things according to his mind and will; for our blessing and happiness are intimately connected with the holiness of God. Suppose there were living in Bristol a person who had long carried on a business, who was known by those intimately acquainted with him to be an idle person, one who shrinks from work; or, whenever he can, gets out of it, and seeks to have an easy time of it. Suppose such a person had heard of the promises about prayer, and should say – “Now I will try if these things are true, and I will ask God to give me £100,000 sterling, and then I can give myself easy days, I can travel about and enjoy myself.” Suppose he prays every day for this large sum of money, will he obtain it? Assuredly not! Why not? He does not ask for it that he may help the poor abundantly; that he may contribute to the work of God more liberally, but he asks that he may spend his life in idleness, and in enjoying the pleasures of the world. He is not asking for things according to the mind of God, and therefore, however long or earnestly he may pray, he will not get the answer. We are only warranted in expecting our prayers to be answered when we ask for things according to the mind of God.

The second point we should notice is, that we do not ask on account of our own goodness or merit, but, as the Scripture expresses it – “In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.” I refer you to John xiv. 13, 14, - “And whatsoever ye shall ask in My name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If ye shall ask anything in My name, I will do it.” The statement is given twice, in order to show the great importance of this truth; for whenever a saying is given twice in the Word of God, we may be sure a weighty and important subject is brought before us. What does this statement, given twice by the Lord Jesus Christ, mean? If we desire to go to Heaven, how shall we get there? On the ground of our own goodness, merit or worthiness? Because we are not so bad as others? Because we go regularly to a place of worship? Because we give a little to the poor? In this way assuredly no one will get to Heaven. It is quite right to go to a place of worship. It is quite right that of the abundance God gives we should contribute to the poor. It is quite right that we should act according to morality. But in this way a poor sinner cannot get to Heaven. We must see our lost and ruined condition by nature, and that we deserve nothing but punishment. The best person in this congregation, in this city, in the United Kingdom, or in the whole world, is a sinner deserving punishment. Never since the fall of Adam has a single person, by his own goodness, obtained Heaven.

Under the old dispensation there was need to look forward to the Messiah, and since the old covenant dispensation has ceased there is need to look back upon the Messiah, Who, in our stead, suffered the punishment due to us, while hanging on the cross and shedding His blood. All our guilt was transferred to Him, that His righteousness might be transferred to us. And now a sinner – thought the oldest and the vilest wretch, under Heaven, as assuredly as he puts his trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, shall be forgiven, shall be cleansed, shall be justified – that is, shall be reckoned righteous and just through this his trust in the Lord Jesus Christ for the salvation of his soul. In this way the sinner gets to heaven – by faith in Jesus for the salvation of his soul.

As by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ we shall stand before God at the last, so it is now in approaching unto God in prayer. If we desire to have our petitions answered, we must come to Him, not in our own name, but as sinners who trust in Jesus, who by faith in His name are united to the blessed risen Lord; who have become, through trusting in Him, members of that body of which He is the

Head. Let none suppose they are good enough in themselves. I deserve nothing but hell. For fifty-four years and nine months, by God's grace, I have walked in the fear of God, and by His grace have lived such a life that no one can point to me and say I am a hypocrite, or charge me with living in any sin. Yet if I have what I deserve, I could expect nothing but hell. I deserve nothing but hell. So precisely with all of you, and the very best and holiest persons that can be found. Therefore on the ground of our goodness we cannot expect to have our prayers answered. But Jesus is worthy, and for His sake we may have our prayers answered. There is nothing too choice, too costly, or too great for God to give to Him. He is worthy. He is the spotless, holy child, Who under all circumstances acted according to the mind of God. And if we trust in Him, if we hide in Him, if we put Him forward, and ourselves in the background, depend on Him and plead His name, we may expect to have our prayers answered. Some one may say "I have prayed through long years for my unconverted children, but they have not yet been converted. I feel I shall not have my prayers answered. I am so unworthy." This is a mistake. The promises are particularly for such – for the weak, for the feeblest, for the ignorant, for the needy; and all such who ask for Christ's sake are warranted to expect their prayers to be answered.

But if it means "I live in sin, I go on habitually in an evil course," the prayer cannot be answered, for in the sixty-sixth Psalm we read, "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me." That is, if I live in sin, and go on in a course hateful to God, I may not expect my prayers to be answered.

A third condition is, that we exercise faith in the power and willingness of God to answer our prayers. This is deeply important. In Mark xi. 24, we read, "What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them." "What things soever ye desire" – of whatever kind – "believe that ye receive them and ye shall have them." I have found invariably, in the fifty-four years and nine months during which I have been a believer, that if I only believed I was sure to get, in God's time, the thing I asked for. I would especially lay this on your heart that you exercise faith in the power and willingness of God to answer your requests. We must believe that God is able and willing. To see that He is able, you have only to look at the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ; for having raised Him from the dead, He must have almighty power. As to the love of God, you have only to look to the cross of Christ, and see His love in not sparing His Son, in not withholding His only begotten Son from death. With these proofs of the power and love of God, assuredly, if we believe, we shall receive – we shall obtain.

Suppose now we ask, firstly, for such things as are according to the mind of God, and only such things can be good for us; secondly that we expect answers on the ground of the merit and righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ, asking in His name; and thirdly, that we exercise faith in the power and willingness of our Heavenly Father to grant our requests; then fourthly, we have to continue patiently waiting on God till the blessing we seek is granted. For observe, nothing is said in the text as to the time in which, or the circumstances under which, the prayer is to be answered. "Ask, and it shall be given to you." There is a positive promise, but nothing as to the time. "Seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you." We have, therefore, patiently and quietly to continue waiting on God till the blessing is granted. Some one may say, "Is it necessary I should bring a matter before God two, three, five, or even twenty times; is it not enough I tell Him once?" We might as well say there is no need to tell Him once, for He knows beforehand what our need is. He wants us to prove that we have confidence in Him, that we take our place as creatures towards the Creator.

Moreover, we are never to lose sight of the fact that there may be particular reasons why prayer may not at once be answered. One reason may be the need for the exercise of our faith, for by exercise faith is strengthened. We all know that if our faith were not exercised it would remain as it was at first. By the trial it is strengthened. Another reason may be that we may glorify God by the manifestation of patience. This is a grace by which God is greatly magnified. Our manifestation of patience glorifies God. There may be another reason. Our heart may not yet be prepared for the answer to our prayer. I will give an illustration. Suppose that three weeks ago a lad of sixteen years of age had been brought to the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ, and that with his heart full of love to the Lord he wanted to do something for the Lord. And suppose he goes to the Superintendent of the Sunday School, and says – “Will you have the kindness to give me a class to teach?” A class of nine children is given him. Now this dear lad, whose heart is full of love to the Lord begins to pray that God would convert these nine children. He prays in private and before them, and also exhorts them to seek the Lord. After going home from his class he gives himself earnestly to prayer that God would convert these nine children. On Monday he repeats his request before God, and so day by day during the week and on Sunday again particularly; and then he goes to his class and expects that these nine children will be converted. He finds, however, they are not, but that they are just in the same state as before. He again sets the Gospel before them; he exhorts, beseeches, and weeps before them. During the second week his prayers are most earnest; but on the following Sunday he finds that none of the nine children are yet converted. Does it mean that God will not answer these prayers? It cannot be that this dear lad will have to go on praying, and God will not regard it. But the reason is that the heart of this lad is not prepared for the blessing. If these children had been converted the first week, he would take credit to himself; he would think what he had been able to do, and would attribute the conversions to his entreaties, instead of to the power of the Holy Ghost. He would take a goodly measure of credit to himself, though he might not be aware of it. But let him patiently go on, and when his heart is prepared for the blessing, God will give it. Thus it is that the child of God has to wait; but when the heart is prepared for the blessing, most assuredly it will be given. Many of the dear children of God stagger, because prayer is not at once answered. And because for weeks, months, and years prayer remains unanswered, they cease to ask God, and thus lose the blessing which, had they persevered, they would assuredly have obtained.

It should be especially noticed that all the children of God, who walk in His ways and wait on Him in prayer, have, more or less frequently, answers to prayer. I will illustrate this. All who in any measure walk before God, at the close of the day thank Him for his mercies, and commend themselves to Him for protection during the night. In the morning they find no fire has happened and no wicked hands have molested them. Here is an answer to prayer, and we have to thank God for it. The more we observe these matters, the more we shall find how we get prayer answered. Many that have suffered from sleeplessness have often, in answer to prayer, had sound refreshing sleep, and have had in the morning to thank God for it.

Now all, on the other hand, have sometimes long to wait for answers to prayer. Many of the dear children of God have long to wait for the conversion of their children. While some receive the blessing very soon, others have to wait for many years. I have had immediate answers to prayer, so many that I could reckon them by tens of thousands. If I say that during the fifty-four years and nine months that I have been a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ I have had thirty thousand answers to prayer, either in the same hour or the same day that the requests were made, I should not go a

particle too far. Often, before leaving my bedroom in the morning, have I had prayer answered that was offered that morning, and in the course of the day I have had five or six more answers to prayer; so that at least thirty thousand prayers have been answered the self-same hour or the self-same day that they were offered. But one or the other might suppose all my prayers have been thus promptly answered. No; not all of them. Sometimes I have had to wait weeks, months, or years; sometimes many years. The man speaking at the present time, whom God has delighted to honour by giving thirty thousand answers to prayer in the same hour or day on which they were offered, this self-same man has had to wait many years for answers to many of his prayers. During the first six weeks of the year 1866 I heard of the conversion of six persons for whom I had been praying for a long time. For one I had been praying between two and three years; for another between three and four years; for the fifth about fifteen years; and for the sixth above twenty years. I asked once a thing of God, which I knew to be according to His mind, and though I brought it day by day and generally many times a day before Him, in such assurance as to be able to thank Him hundreds of times for the answer before it was received, yet I had to wait three years and ten months before the blessing was given to me. At another time I had to wait six years; and at another time eleven and a half years. In the last case I brought the matter about twenty thousand times before God, and invariably in the fullest assurance of faith, and yet eleven and a half years passed before the answer was given.

In one instance my faith has been tried even more than this. In November 1844, I began to pray for the conversion of five individuals. I prayed every day without one single intermission, whether sick or in health, on the land or on the sea, and whatever the pressure of my engagements might be. Eighteen months elapsed before the first of the five was converted. I thanked God, and prayed on for the others. Five years elapsed, and then the second one was converted. I thanked God for the second, and prayed on for the other three. Day by day I continued to pray for them and six years more passed before the third was converted. I thank God for the three, and went on praying for the other two. These two remain unconverted. The man to whom God in the riches of His grace has given tens of thousands of answers to prayer, in the self-same hour or day on which they were offered, has been praying day by day for nearly thirty-six years for the conversion of these two individuals, and yet they remain unconverted; for next November it will be thirty-six years since I began to pray for their conversion. But I hope in God, I pray on, and look yet for the answer.*

*One of these persons was converted before Mr Müller's death, and the other only gave clear evidence of conversion after Mr Müller had passed away.

Therefore, beloved brethren and sisters, go on waiting upon God, go on praying; only be sure you ask for things which are according to the mind of God. The conversion of sinners is according to the mind of God, for He does not desire the death of the sinner. This is the revelation God has made of Himself – “Not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.” Go on, therefore, praying; expect an answer, look for it, and in the end you will have to praise God for it.

There is one point I would especially lay on the hearts of my beloved brethren and sisters, and that is united prayer. In Matthew xviii 19, the Lord Jesus says – “If two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of My Father which is in Heaven.” If, therefore, there are brethren and sisters in Christ who have unconverted relatives, and if they could unite with two or more persons, and unitedly ask God to convert their children, oh, what blessing

might not come in this way? They should plead this promise before the Lord, read it out when they meet, and put their finger – so to speak – upon it. If they meet once a week for half an hour, or once a fortnight, or as often as they conveniently could, to plead this promise before the Lord, after awhile a father would have to say, “My son, who almost broke my heart, has been converted;” and a mother, “I have a letter from my daughter, who fifteen years ago left my home, and has been living in sin, telling me she has found the Lord Jesus Christ.”

How their faith would be strengthened by such united prayer and such testimonies! After awhile, as their faith got strengthened, they would unitedly pray for their Pastor, that God would more abundantly bless his labours in the conversion of sinners, and in blessing on the Church; and as they got further enlarged their prayers would extend to Missions, the circulation of the Scriptures and tracts. They would know the power and blessedness of prayer more and more abundantly, and would wait earnestly upon God, asking Him yet once more, in these days, to grant a mighty revival in the Church of Christ at large.

If this were generally so, with what power ministers would set forth the truth of the Gospel, what blessings would come on our Sunday Schools, on the circulation of the Scriptures, on open-air preaching, and other Christian work. God grant we may more earnestly give ourselves to prayer!

I have found it a great blessing to treasure up in the memory the answers God graciously gives me. I have always kept a record to strengthen the memory. I advise the keeping of a little memorandum book. On one side - say the left hand side – put down the petition and the date when you began to offer it. Let the opposite page be left blank to put down the answer in each case, and you will soon find how many answers you get, and thus you will be strengthened; and especially you will see what a lovely, bountiful, and gracious Being God is; your heart will go out more and more in love to God, and you will say, “It is my Heavenly Father Who has been so kind, I will trust in Him, I will confide in Him.”

With regard to any who do not yet know Him, let the first prayer be offered tonight, before you leave this place – “Show me I am a sinner.” When you see this, ask the Lord – “Help me to put my trust in the Lord Jesus Christ,” and you will find how ready God is to give blessing. May we all who are the people of God receive a blessing, and our dear friends and fellow-sinners be stirred up to seek Him while He is to be found!” God grant it for Jesus’ sake.



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