

Scripture Studies

Vol. XI, No. 10

DEC. 2004/
JAN. 2005

“Come now, let us reason together,’ says the Lord...” I saiah 1:18

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Scripture Studies (ISSN: 1520-4308) is edited by Scott Sperling and published ten times a year by Scripture Studies, Inc., a non-profit organization. It is distributed all over the world by postal mail and via the internet free of charge. If you would like to financially support the publication and distribution of *Scripture Studies*, send contributions to:

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20010 Via Natalie
Yorba Linda, CA 92887
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Old Testament Study: Exodus 11:1-10

The Death of the Firstborn, pt. 1 **by Arthur W. Pink (1886-1952)**

¹And the LORD said unto Moses, "Yet will I bring one plague more upon Pharaoh, and upon Egypt; afterwards he will let you go hence: when he shall let you go, he shall surely thrust you out hence altogether. ²Speak now in the ears of the people, and let every man borrow of his neighbour, and every woman of her neighbour, jewels of silver, and jewels of gold." ³And the LORD gave the people favour in the sight of the Egyptians. Moreover the man Moses was very great in the land of Egypt, in the sight of Pharaoh's servants, and in the sight of the people.

⁴And Moses said, "Thus saith the LORD, 'About midnight will I go out into the midst of Egypt: ⁵And all the firstborn in the land of Egypt shall die, from the firstborn of Pharaoh that sitteth upon his throne, even unto the firstborn of the maidservant that [is] behind the mill; and all the firstborn of beasts. ⁶And there shall be a great cry throughout all the land of Egypt, such as there was none like it, nor shall be like it any more. ⁷But against any of the children of Israel shall not a dog move his tongue, against man or beast: that ye may know how that the LORD doth put a difference between the Egyptians and Israel.' ⁸And all these thy servants shall come down unto me, and bow down themselves unto me, saying, 'Get thee out, and all the people that follow thee': and after that I will go out." And he went out from Pharaoh in a great anger.

⁹And the LORD said unto Moses, "Pharaoh shall not hearken unto you; that my wonders may be multiplied in the land of Egypt." ¹⁰And Moses and Aaron did all these wonders before Pharaoh: and the LORD hardened Pharaoh's heart, so that he would not let the children of Israel go out of his land. (AV)

The contest between Pharaoh and Jehovah was almost ended. Abundant opportunity had been given the king to repent him of his wicked defiance. Warning after warning and plague after plague had been sent. But

Egypt's ruler still **"hardened his heart"**. One more judgment was appointed, the heaviest of them all, and then not only would Pharaoh *let* the people go, but he would thrust them out. Then would be clearly shown the folly of fighting against God. Then would be fully demonstrated the uselessness of resisting Jehovah. Then would be made manifest the impotence of the creature and the omnipotence of the Most High. **"There are many devices in a man's heart; nevertheless the counsel of the Lord, that shall stand"** (Proverbs 19:21). **"For the Lord of hosts hath purposed, and who shall disannul it? And His hand is stretched out, and who shall turn it back?"** (Isaiah 14:27). No matter though it be the king of the most powerful empire upon earth, **"Those that walk in pride God is able to abase"** (Daniel 4:21). Pharaoh might ask in haughty defiance, **"Who is the Lord, that I should obey His voice to let Israel go?"** He might blatantly declare, **"I know not the Lord, neither will I let Israel go"** (Ex. 5:2). But now the time had almost arrived when he would be glad to get rid of that people whose God had so sorely troubled him and his land. As well might a worm seek to resist the tread of an elephant as for the creature to successfully defy the Almighty. God can grind to powder the hardest heart, and bring down to the dust the haughtiest spirit.

"And the Lord said unto Moses, 'Yet will I bring one plague more upon Pharaoh, and upon Egypt; afterwards he will let you go hence; when he shall let you go, he shall surely thrust you out hence altogether'" (vs. 1). **"One plague more"**. The severest of them all was this, directed as it was against **"the chief of their strength"** (Psalm 78:51). A mightier king than Pharaoh would visit the land of Egypt that night. The "king of terrors" would lay his unsparing hand upon the first-born. And with all their wisdom and learning Pharaoh and his people would be helpless. The magicians were of no avail in such an emergency. There was no withstanding the Angel of Death! Neither wealth nor science could provide deliverance. Those in the palace were not one whit more secure than the occupants of the humblest cottage. Longsuffering God had surely shown Himself, but now His holy anger was to burst forth with irresistible might, and bitter and widespread would be the resulting lamentations.

"Speak now in the ears of the people, and let every man borrow of his neighbor, and every woman of her neighbor, jewels of silver, and jewels of gold" (vs. 2). This and the verse that follows are to be regarded as a parenthesis. The night on which the first-born were slain came between the fourteenth and fifteenth days of the month Nisan. And yet in Ex. 12:3 we find the Lord telling Moses to instruct Israel to take them every man a lamb on the tenth day of the month. Similarly, here in Exodus, the body of the chapter is concerned with what took place on the Passover night, verses 2 and 3 coming in parenthetically as a brief notice of what had happened previously.

That which is recorded in verse 2 has been seized upon by enemies of

God's truth and made the ground of an ethical objection. The word "**borrow**" implies that the article should later be returned. But there was no thought of the Israelites giving back these "**jewels**" to the Egyptians. From this it is argued that God was teaching His people to practice deception and dishonesty. But all ground for such an objection is at once swept away if the Hebrew word here translated "**borrow**" be rendered correctly. The Hebrew word is "Sha'al". It occurs 168 times in the Old Testament, and 162 times it is translated "ask, beg or require". The Septuagint (the Greek translation of the O.T. f.) gives "aites" (ask). Jeromes' Latin version renders it by "postulabit" (ask, request). The German translation by Luther reads "Fordern" (demand). The mistake has been corrected by the English Revisers, who give "ask" rather than "borrow". While the substitution of "ask" for "borrow" removes all ground for the infidel's objection that Israel were guilty of a fraudulent transaction, there is still a difficulty remaining — felt by many a devout mind. Why should the Lord bid His people "ask" for anything from their enemies? In receiving from the Egyptians, they were but taking what was their own. For long years had the Hebrews toiled in the brick-kilns. Fully, then, had they earned what they now asked for. Lawfully were they entitled to these jewels. Yet we believe that the real, more satisfactory answer, lies deeper than this. Everything here has a profound typical meaning. The world is greatly indebted to the presence of God's people in it. Much, very much, of the benevolence practiced by the unregenerate is the outcome of this. Our charitable institutions, our agencies for relieving suffering, are really by-products of Christianity: hospitals, and poor-houses are unknown in lands where the light of the Gospel has not shone. When, then, God took His people out of Egypt, He made its inhabitants feel the resultant loss. In like manner when the saints are all raptured at the descent of Christ into the air, the world will probably be made to feel that all true blessing and enlightenment has departed from it.

"And the Lord gave the people favor in the sight of the Egyptians" (11:3). This was the fulfillment of the promise made by the Lord to Moses at the burning bush: **"And I will give this people favor in the sight of the Egyptians: and it shall come to pass, that, when ye go, ye shall not go empty"** (3:21). And it was also the fulfillment of one of the promises which Jehovah made to Abraham four hundred years earlier: **"And also that nation, whom they shall serve will I judge: and afterward shall they come out with great substance"** (Genesis 15:14).

This is very blessed. No word of God can fail. For many long years the Hebrews had been a nation of slaves, and as they toiled in the brick-kilns there were no outward signs that they were likely to leave Egypt **"with great substance"**. But the people of God are not to walk by sight, but by faith. How this fulfillment of God's ancient promise to Abraham should show the certainty of Him making good all His promises to us! **"And the Lord gave the people favor in the sight of the Egyptians"** (11:3).

Herein Jehovah manifested His absolute sovereignty. From the natural standpoint there was every reason why the Egyptians should hate the Israelites more than ever. Not only were they, as a pastoral people, an **“abomination unto the Egyptians”** (Genesis 46:34), but it was the God of the Hebrews who had so severely plagued them and their land. It was therefore due alone to God’s all-mighty power, moving upon the hearts of the Egyptians which caused them to now regard His people with favor. Similar examples are furnished by the cases of Joseph and Potiphar (Genesis 39:3), Joseph and the prison-keeper (Genesis 39:21), Daniel and his master (Daniel 1:9) etc. Let us learn from these passages that when we receive kindness from the hands of the unregenerate it is because God has given us favor in their sight.

“And Moses said, ‘Thus saith the Lord, ‘About midnight will I go out into the midst of Egypt’” (11:4). Moses was still in the Court. Chapter 11:1-4 should be read straight on from 10:28, 29. The seeming interval between the two chapters disappears if we read 11:1 (as the Hebrew fully warrants) **“the Lord had said unto Moses.”** God’s servant, then, was still in Pharaoh palace, though the king and his courtiers were unable to see him because of the **“thick darkness”** which enveloped the land of Egypt. If further proof be required for this the 8th verse of our chapter supplies it, for there we read, **“And all these thy servants shall come down unto me, and bow down themselves unto me, saying, ‘Get thee out, and all the people that follow me: and after that I will go out. And he went out from Pharaoh in a great anger’”**. The fourteenth day of Nisan had arrived, and after delivering the Divine ultimatum, Moses left forever the palace of the Pharaohs’. **“And Moses said, ‘Thus saith the Lord, ‘About midnight will I go out into the midst of Egypt: And all the firstborn in the land of Egypt shall die, from the firstborn of Pharaoh that sitteth upon his throne, even unto the firstborn of the maidservant that is behind the mill; and all the firstborn of beasts. And there shall be a great cry throughout all the land of Egypt, such as there was none like it, nor shall be like it anymore’”** (11:4-6).

How this reminds us of that solemn word in Romans 11:22, **“Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God: on them which fell, severity; but toward thee, goodness!”** In exempting His own people from this heavy stroke of judgment we behold the **“goodness”** of the Lord; in the slaying of all the firstborn of the Egyptians we see His **“severity”**. But why, it may be asked, should the **“firstborn”** be destroyed? At least a two-fold answer may be returned to this. It commonly happens that in the governmental dealings of God, the sins of the fathers are visited upon the children. In the second place, Romans 9:22 teaches us that the **“vessels of wrath”** are made by God for the express purpose of showing His wrath and making known His power. The slaying of the children rather than their parents served to accomplish this the more manifestly. Again, the

death of the first born was a representative judicial infliction. It spoke of the judgment of God coming upon all that is of the natural man; the first-born like **“the first-fruits”** being a sample of all the rest. But why slay the firstborn of all the Egyptians, when Pharaoh only was rebellious and defiant? Answer: It is clear from Exodus 14:17 that the rank and file of the Egyptians were far from being guiltless.

“But against any of the children of Israel shall not a dog move his tongue against man or beast: that ye may know how that the Lord doth put a difference between the Egyptians and Israel” (11:7). Marvelous example was this of the absolute sovereignty of Divine grace. As we shall yet see, the Israelites, equally with the Egyptians, fully merited the wrath of God. It was not because of any virtue or excellence in them that the Hebrews were spared. They, too, had sinned and come short of the glory of God. It was simply according to His own good pleasure that God made this difference: **“For He saith to Moses I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion”** (Romans 9:15).

And this was no isolated instance. It was characteristic of the ways of God in every age. It is the same today. Some are in Christ; many are out of Christ: sovereign grace alone has made the difference. There can be only one answer to the apostle’s question **“who maketh thee to differ from another?”** (1 Corinthians 4:7) — it is God. It is not because our hearts (by nature) are more tender, more responsive to the Holy Spirit, than the hearts of unbelievers; it is not that our wills are more pliable and less stubborn. Nor is it because of any superior mental acumen which enabled us to see our need of a Savior. No. Grace, distinguishing grace, sovereign grace, is the discriminating cause. Then let us see to it that we give God all the glory for it!

“But against any of the children of Israel shall not a dog move his tongue”. Striking proof was this that every creature is beneath the direct control of the great Creator! It was nighttime when the Angel of death executed God’s sentence. Moreover, **“thick darkness”** shrouded the land. On every side was the weeping and howling of the Egyptians, as they discovered that their firstborn had been smitten down. Moreover, there was the movement of the Israelites, as by their hundreds of thousands they proceeded to leave the land of bondage. There was, then, every reason why the “dogs” should bark and howl, yea, why they should rush upon the Hebrews. But not a single dog moved his tongue! An invisible Hand locked their jaws. Just as Babylon’s lions were rendered harmless by God, when Daniel was cast into their den, so Egypt’s dogs were stricken dumb when Jehovah’s people set out for the promised land. What comfort and assurance is there here for the believer to-day. Not so much as a fly can settle upon you without the Creator’s bidding, any more than the demons could enter the herd of swine until Christ gave them permission.

(This study will continue in the next issue.)

A Classic Study: The Value of a Good Name



A Classic Study by Richard Greenham (1531–1591)

[Here we continue a study by the esteemed servant of God, Richard Greenham. In this issue, he speaks of ways that lead to a good name.]—
Ed.

Of a Good Name, pt. 3

A good name is to be desired above great riches, and loving favour above silver and gold. (Prov. 22:1, AV).

Then to return to our purposes, if we will avoid an evil name, we must avoid all evil surmises and devices against others. And thus the Scriptures does also forbid us: for the Wiseman from the mouth of God does forbid us to think evil of the king in our bedchambers, because birds and other dumb creatures shall disclose the thing rather than it kept close (see Eccl. 10:20). This then must make us afraid to do evil, or to imagine ill in our beds, or to declare our deep counsels even to them that lie in our bosoms. And this as it is a good means to provide for a good name, so it is a special rule of all godliness, not when we be afraid of open sins alone, but of secret evils: not of acts alone, but even of the secret cogitations and thoughts of our hearts. Thus we have heard the first step that leads to a good name.

The second remains to be declared: and that is a godly jealousy over a man's own doings, that they may not breed suspicion of evil. For it does sometimes come to pass, that albeit a man does not that which is simply evil, he may justly be suspected and suffer some blemish of his good name. And for this cause does the Apostle charge us to procure honest things in the sight of God and man. For this cause he commands us, that if there be anything of good report, that we must follow it, and that we must embrace it. It is not therefore that men did say, 'I did think no evil, I did mean no harm': for if through want of care or discretion you have ventured upon the occasion, you have given a great number to your great discredit. If then we will avoid this evil name, as our proverb says, we must avoid all things that bring it. For when men will care little to give occasion, then the Lord causes an evil name to be raised upon them, that those which indeed are

desperate may suffer just discredit, and they that are otherwise, may be reclaimed for the fame. And surely such is the crookedness of man's nature, that if the Lord should not take this course, even his children would fall into many sins. Therefore it is most requisite that men be mindful to avoid occasions, and so much the rather, because it is commonly said, either God or the devil stands at their elbow to work upon them.

Let us see this in some example of our common life. You are accustomed to walk abroad at inconvenient times, at that time some thing is stolen, and you are burdened and charged with it. Again, you used to deal too familiarly and lightly with a maid, she is gotten with child, and the fault is laid on you. Hereof you have given suspicion, because you have been a night goer, and such a one who has dealt wantonly with the maid, albeit you be free from the very act. Now if you be the child of God, and if you be guided by His Holy Spirit, then will He teach thee to take profit by this false report, and to say with the self, "Lord you know that I am free from this very act: yet it was my sin to give any such occasion whereby men might suspect me: this sin O Lord I am guilty of, and I know You for this sin has justly afflicted me. Yet, dear father, I see the mercy in this, that whereas indeed I have committed many sins Thou has passed over them and take this whereof I am not so much guilty: so that now (most merciful Father), I do rather suffer for righteousness, than for my transgressions and sin. Yea dear Father I do behold Your tender mercies in this towards me, that by this evil report, You go about to stay me from that sin, and to prevent me that I may never fall into the same. Wherefore seeing it had been Thy good pleasure to deal thus with me, behold Lord I do repent me of my former sin, and promise before thee even in the fear never to do this or the like sin ever hereafter."

See here, I beseech you the good profit which a good child of God, through God's Spirit, will take of this slanderous reproach, after he hath received some godly sorrow for giving the occasion of that report. But behold the contrary work of Satan in the heart of unbelievers, for he will soon teach them this lesson, and cause them to say this: "What does the church accuse me of without a cause? Does he father such a villainous act upon me, who never deferred it at his hands? Surely he shall not say so for naught, I will make his sayings true, and will do the thing indeed." Consider then this you that fear the Lord, and see in how fickle a state they do stand which have given occasion, and in what great dander they be to be brought to commit the same or the like sin afterward. Therefore if any will be sure to keep his good name, then must he be sure to avoid all such occasions as might impair and hinder it. And thus much for the second step whereby we arise to a good name. Thus we have heard of two degrees towards a good name, in the avoiding of evil and the occasions thereof. And these indeed have a great force to stay an evil name, but sure they be not able to build up a good name and credit among men.

To these therefore there must be added a third thing which has most special force for this purpose, and that is that we be plentiful in good works. This does our Savior Christ charge us to be careful of, when he says, **“Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works”** (Matt. 5:16). Many men repine at the good report of another man, and they be greatly grieved, because they themselves be not in the like or some better credit. He that will be commended, must do the things that be commendable. He must do good works, yea he must do good and pursue it. Yea, we must know that it is not one good work, not two, not three that can gain us a good name indeed: but it is required at us that we be rich in well going, and continually give to every good work. For as a precious ointment (whereto a good name is compared) is made of many and most excellent samples: so a good name cannot be gotten but by many and most excellent virtues.

Now when we feel ourselves affected to goodness, then are we warily to see two things: first, that all our works be done with a simple and sincere affection; secondly, that they be done with good discretion. For when a thing is done indiscreetly and without advice, it loses the grace and beauty of the deed; and therefore though the thing be good, yet no great praise does come of it, because it was not done with good discretion.

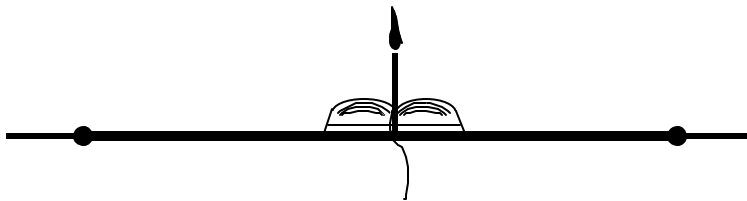
Likewise when men do things with sinister affections, and to some other end then to the glory of God, they do commonly lose the price of their doings. And here of it comes to pass, that many men which do good works to merit by them, or to win the favor of the superiors, or to be of good report among the people, or to some such other end, when (I say) men do things to this end the Lord punishes them with the contrary, and instead of deserving glory, He powers confusion upon them; instead of honor, He gives contempt; and instead of riches, beggary. And albeit men may pretend the glory of God, and give out their wickedness with a fresh color, yet the Lord will bring their wickedness to light. And truly it is marvelous to see how the Lord lays folly upon such men: so that although in their wisdom they think to blur the eyes of all men, yet the simple soul does see their shifts to their discredit.

Therefore when you have done well, and yet are ill reported of, do not straight away storm against him which has raised up the report against you, neither do you over hastily clear yourself: but rather, before the Lord examine your own heart, and see with what affection you have done it: And if we find wickedness in our hearts, then let us be humbled before the Lord, and know that He has caused us thus to be spoken of: first to correct us, and secondly to try us. For when the Lord does see us like Scribes and Pharisees seeking rewards, then He does punish us with the loss of our labor, and with shame among men, to see if thereby He can bring us into sight of our sins, which before we neither would nor could see. And again when we have thus done, He does try us whether there be any good-

ness in our hearts which may move us to continue in well-doing, notwithstanding we be evil spoken of.

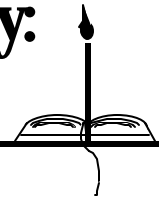
Here we may see what fruit we must make of such reports: namely, they must bring us to a sight and feeling of our sins: and secondly, they must cause us with greater uprightness to continue in well doing. True, a man may be accused to have this or that purpose in his doings, although he has done the thing in the simplicity of his heart. But when a man through examination does find his heart upright, and he receives great comfort by it: then he may commend himself unto the Lord, and his cause into His hands. For the Lord maintains good tongues and hearts, but he will cut out the tongues of them that speak lies. He will cause the righteousness of the righteous to shine as the noon day, and as the Sun after a cloud; but the wicked shall be covered with their own confusion as with a cloak.

This shall the godly see and rejoice therein, but the mouths of the wicked shall be stopped. Thus we have run through the things whereby a good name may be gotten, and not only that, but also whereby a man may be preserved in a good name and credit: and therefore surely the more to be observed and regarded of us. For first of all we see what force the good continuance of the Churches beyond the seas has to persuade men to embrace the truth, and how soon some men will be moved to continue steadfast, when they see the steadfast countenance of the good men in all kind of godliness. However, we know that the weak commit great offenses, and then whole Churches, or some particular persons of some good place and credit, do not stand in that credit, nor maintain by goodness their good name, which they had gotten by great virtues. The very heathen did see this, and therefore they said that it was as great a praise to keep praise, as to get it: yea, and when they saw what great inconveniences would arise when men did not satisfy the expectation of the people, they thought it much better never to have any good report among men, than to lose it after it had been gotten. Therefore, to shut up this whole matter in one word, if any man, if any household, if any town, if any country, be careful to have a honest report among men, then must they eschew evil and do good, then must they seek peace and pursue it: and if once having gotten a good name they would gladly keep it, then they must use the same means, so shall we have it both of God and man.



New Testament Study:

Matthew 19:23-29



The Disadvantages of Wealth

²³Then Jesus said to His disciples, “I tell you the truth, it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. ²⁴Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.”

²⁵When the disciples heard this, they were greatly astonished and asked, “Who then can be saved?”

²⁶Jesus looked at them and said, “With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.”

²⁷Peter answered Him, “We have left everything to follow you! What then will there be for us?”

²⁸Jesus said to them, “I tell you the truth, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on His glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

²⁹And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or fields for my sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life.

In the previous section, a rich, young man came to Jesus, asking: **“Teacher, what good thing must I do to get eternal life?”** (Matt. 19:16). In the end, sensing that the man’s riches had too great a hold on him, Jesus said: **“If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me”** (Matt. 19:21). The rich, young man did not heed this request of Jesus. Instead, the rich, young man **“went away sad, because he had great wealth”** (Matt. 19:22).

In this section, Jesus responds to that episode: **“Then Jesus said to His disciples, ‘I tell you the truth, it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven’”** (vs. 23). Jesus speaks of the difficulty for wealthy people to **“enter the kingdom of heaven.”** This difficulty stems from a variety of reasons: “Riches, which all desire to obtain—riches, for which men labor and toil, and become gray before their time—riches are the most perilous possession. They often inflict great injury on the soul;

they lead men into many temptations; they engross men's thoughts and affections; they bind heavy burdens on the heart, and make the way to heaven even more difficult than it naturally is" [Ryle, 242]. "How few of the rich even hear the Gospel! They are too great, too fine, too busy, too proud to regard the lower preacher of the Gospel of the poor. If, perchance, they do hear the heavenly message, they have not the necessities and tribulations which drive men from the present world to seek consolation in the world to come, and so they feel no need to accept Christ" [Spurgeon, 270].

So, with regard to spiritual matters—and spiritual matters are the most important that we, as human beings, deal with—it is much better not to be wealthy. "This teaching is very useful for everyone: for the rich, that they are warned to beware of their danger; for the poor, that they may be content with their lot and not greedily seek what would do them more harm than good" [Calvin, 259].

Jesus gives a picturesque illustration of the difficulty for the wealthy to enter heaven: **"Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God"** (vs. 24). Now, I have heard some preach sermons that water this illustration down by, for instance, saying that what Jesus meant by **"needle"** was actually a small gate leading into Jerusalem. These preachers are implying that, if one tries really hard (by, say, unloading the camel) that they could indeed get the camel through the **"needle"**. Such teaching misunderstands what Jesus is saying. This illustration is pointing out the *impossibility* (see vs. 26) for the rich to enter heaven by their own means. "There is no sense in hunting up abstruse metaphors where the proverbial teaching is as plain as possible" [Spurgeon, 269]. "The camel was the largest beast familiar to the Jews, and the needle's eye was the smallest opening in any familiar object... It is perfectly evident that Jesus was understood, and meant to be understood, as stating an impossibility" [Broadus, 408]. "This is a proverbial expression, denoting a difficulty altogether unconquerable by the art and power of man; nothing less than the almighty grace of God will enable a rich man to get over this difficulty" [Henry].

The disciples were surprised by this teaching: **"When the disciples heard this, they were greatly astonished and asked, 'Who then can be saved?'"** (vs. 25). They were **"greatly astonished"** because their culture viewed riches as a sign of God's favor. To them, the riches themselves were a sign that the wealthy man would enter heaven. "Most Jews expected the rich to inherit eternal life, not because their wealth could buy their way in, but because their wealth testified to the blessing of the Lord on their lives" [Carson, 425]. Thus, they asked the question: **"Who then can be saved?"** In their view, if it was difficult for the rich man to enter

heaven, it would be impossible for anyone else to. Jesus corrected these beliefs concerning the spiritual state of the rich. "Where the people of His day saw riches as a manifest sign of the blessing God, Jesus saw wealth as a hindrance to spiritual progress" [Morris, 493]. "Note, it should be a satisfaction to them who are in a low condition, that they are not exposed to the temptations of a high and prosperous condition: If they live more hardy in this world than the rich, yet, if withal they get more easily to a better world, they have no reason to complain" [Henry, 631].

Jesus answered their question of astonishment: **"Jesus looked at them and said, 'With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible'"** (vs. 26). Though it be impossible by man's ability for the "camel" to go through "the eye of the needle", it is not impossible by God's ability. In actuality, it is "impossible" for any man, rich or poor, to enter heaven by his own merits. Man is fallen, and all men "fall short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23). God, in His love for us, made it possible for us enter heaven by sending His Son, Jesus, to die for us. The salvation of our souls only becomes a "possibility" through God's work, not ours. "God is mighty to save. **'With God all things are possible.'** What a joyful truth for the writer and the reader! Our salvation, when we view our own weakness and the power of sin, **'is impossible with men.'** Only when we turn to God and His grace, does salvation range among the possibilities" [Spurgeon, 270]. Jesus paid the price for our sins, so that we would not have to be punished for them, and so that we could attain the holiness, through Jesus Christ, to enter into God's presence upon death, and live for eternity in heaven with Him. May the Lord be praised!

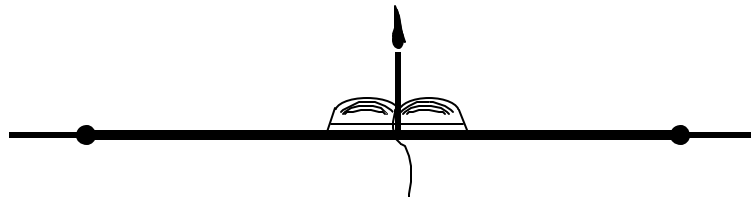
As stated above, the reason for Jesus' teaching on the difficulty of the rich entering the kingdom of God was to respond to the episode of the rich, young man who would not leave his wealth to follow Jesus. Peter points out to Jesus that the disciples did what the rich, young man would not do: **"Peter answered Him, 'We have left everything to follow you! What then will there be for us?'"** (vs. 27). This seems to be somewhat of a self-serving and mercenary comment of Peter's. It even seems a bit childish, smacking of "Look what I have done, daddy!" "What Peter said was true, but it was not wisely spoken. It has a selfish, grasping look, and it is worded so barely that it ought not in that fashion to have come from a servant to his Lord. After all, what have any of us to lose for Jesus compared with what we gain by Him? **'What shall we have?'** is a question which we need not raise, for we ought rather to think of what we have already received at our Lord's hands" [Spurgeon, 271].

And yet, we must remember that the Twelve disciples *did* indeed **"leave everything"** to follow Jesus. "Little as these first believers had to leave, it was their *all*, and they had forsaken it to follow Jesus" [Spurgeon,

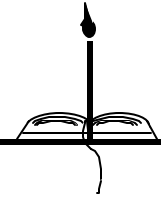
271]. “They had made real sacrifices, and were following Him in worldly destitution with dismal worldly prospects, for they were now near Jerusalem, where He would be rejected and put to death” [Broadus, 409]. Moreover, and certainly Jesus knew this, nearly all of these disciples would later suffer a martyr’s death. So, in a very true sense, they **“left everything”** in this world to follow Jesus.

Jesus did not rebuke Peter in any way for his comment, but rather comforted the disciples greatly with His response: **“Jesus said to them, ‘I tell you the truth, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on His glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or fields for my sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life’”** (vss. 28–29). Jesus in this response showed great respect for the sacrifice of the Twelve disciples, and He let them know that they would be greatly rewarded for what they had given up to follow Him. The Twelve disciples in particular are to receive a special and glorious reward: **“You who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel”** (vs. 28). They are to receive a place of honor and authority in the kingdom of God.

And there are rewards in store, not just for the Twelve disciples, but for anyone who makes a sacrifice to follow Jesus: **“And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or fields for my sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life”** (vs. 29). “We may rest assured that no man shall ever be a real loser by following Christ. The believer may seem to suffer loss for a time, when he first begins the life of a decided Christian; he may be much cast down by the afflictions that are brought upon him on account of his religion: but let him rest assured that he will never find himself a loser in the long run” [Ryle, 244]. What a magnificent and loving Lord we have! Our lives should be His for the taking, and we should gladly leave anything just for the privilege of serving Him, and yet, He rewards us for any sacrifice made by us, even a hundred-fold. May the Lord be praised! Let us lift up our praises to Him!



A Topical Study: On Prayer



[Here we continue a series on Prayer. This begins our second study in this series, which is self-described as, "A declaration what true prayer is, how we should pray, and for what we should pray. Set forth be John Knox, Preacher of God's Holy Word."—*Ed.*]

The True Nature of Prayer, pt. 1 **by John Knox (1505-1572)**

How necessary is it that no Christian be ignorant of the right Invocation of God's name (otherwise called perfect Prayer), seeing it is the very branch which springs forth of true faith, whereof if any men be destitute, notwithstanding he be endowed with whatsoever other virtues, yet in the presence of God is he reputed for no Christian at all. Therefore a manifest sign it is, that such as in prayer always are negligent, do understand nothing of perfect Faith: For if the fire be without heat, or the burning lamp without light, then true Faith may be without fervent Prayer. But because, in times past was (and yet alas, with no small number is) that reckoned to be Prayer while in the sight of God was and is nothing less, I intend shortly to touch the circumstances thereof.

What Prayer Is: Those who will pray, must know and understand that Prayer is an earnest and familiar talking with God, to whom we declare our miseries, who's support and help we implore and desire in our adversities, and whom we laud and praise for our benefits received. So that Prayer contains the exposition of our troubles, the desire of God's defense, and the praising of His magnificent name, as the Psalms of David do clearly teach.

What is to be Observant in Prayer: That prayer be most reverently done, should provoke us the consideration in who's presence we stand, to whom we speak, and what we desire: standing in the presence of the Omnipotent Creator of heaven and earth, and of all the contents thereof; to whom assist and serves a thousand thousand of angels, giving obedience to His eternal Majesty; and speaking unto Him who knows the secrets of our hearts, before whom dissimulation and lies are always odious and hateful; and asking that thing which may be made to His glory, and to the comfort of our conscience. But diligently should we attend, that such things as may offend His godly presence, to the uttermost of our power, may be re-

moved. And first, that worldly cares and fleshly cogitations (such as draw us from contemplation of our God), be expelled from us, that we may freely, without interruption call upon God. But, how difficult it is to perform this one thing in prayer. It is difficult even for those who are not content to renounce within the bands of their own vanity, but who do strive to attain to a purity in prayer, asking not such things as the foolish reason of man desires, but which may be pleasing and acceptable in God's presence. Our adversary, Satan, at all times compassing us about, is never more busy than when we address and bend ourselves to Prayer. O! how secretly and subtly he creeps into our breasts, and calling us back from God, causing us to forget what we have to do; so that frequently when we (with all reverence) should speak to God, we find our hearts talking with the vanities of the world, or with the foolish imaginations of our own conceit.

How the Spirit makes intercession for us: So that without the Spirit of God supporting our infirmities (mightily making intercession for us with unceasing groans, which cannot be expressed with our tongue), there is no hope that anything we desire can be according to God's will. I mean not that the Holy Ghost does mourn or pray, but that He stirs up our minds, giving to us a desire or boldness in prayer, and causing us to mourn when we are extracted or pulled therefore. Which things to conceive, no strength of man suffices, neither is able of itself; but hereof it is plain, that such as understand not of what they pray, or expound not, or declare not the desire of their hearts clearly in God's presence, and in time of prayer (to their possibilities) do not expel vain cogitations from their minds, profit nothing in prayer.

Why we should pray, and also understand what we do pray: But men will object and say, "Albeit we understand not what we pray, yet God understands, who knows the secrets of our hearts; He knows also what we need, although we express not, or declare not, our necessities unto Him." Such men verily declare themselves never to have understanding what perfect Prayer meant, not to what end Jesus Christ commands us to pray; which is, first, that our hearts may be inflamed with continual fear, honor, and love of God, to whom we run for support and help whatsoever danger or necessity requires; that we, so learning to notify our desires in His presence, He may teach us what is to be desired, and what not. Secondly, that we, knowing our petitions to be granted by God alone, to Him only we must render and give love and praise, and that we ever having His infinite graces fixed in our minds, may constantly abide to receive that which with fervent prayer we desire.

Why God defers to grant our prayer: For some time God defers or prolongs to grant our petitions, for the exercise and trial of our faith, and not that He sleeps or is absent from us at any time, but that with more gladness we might receive that which with long expectation we have

abided; that thereby we are assured of His eternal providence (so far as the infirmity of our corrupt and most weak nature will permit), doubt not but His merciful hand shall relieve us, in most urgent necessity, and extreme tribulation. Therefore, such men teach us that necessarily it is not required that we understand what we pray, because God knows what we need, would also teach us that neither we honor God, nor give unto Him thanks for benefits received; for how shall we honor and praise Him, who's goodness and liberty we know not? And how shall we know, that we receive and some time have experienced? And how shall we know that we have received, unless we know verily what we have asked?

The second thing to be observed in perfect Prayer is, that standing in the presence of God, we be found such as do bear His holy law reverently, earnestly repenting from iniquities past, and intending to lead a new life; for otherwise in vain are all our prayers. As it is written, **"Who so withdraws his ear that he may not hear the law, his prayer shall be abominable"** (Prov. 28:9). Likewise Isaiah and Jeremiah say thus, **"You shall multiply your prayers, and I shall not hear, because your hands are full of blood"** (Isa. 1:15); that is, of all cruelty and mischievous works. Also the Spirit of God appears by the mouth of the blind (whom Jesus Christ did illuminate) by these words, **"We knew that God hears not sinners,"** (see John 9:31), that is, such as glory and do continue in iniquity; so that of necessity, true repentance must needs be had, and go before perfect prayer, or sincere Invocation of God's name.

When Sinners are not heard of God: And unto these two precedents must be annexed the third, which is, the dejection of ourselves in God's presence, utterly refusing and casting of our own justice, with all cogitations and opinion thereof. And let us not think that we should be hard for anything proceeding of ourselves, for all such as advance, boast, or depend anything upon their own justice, from the presence of His mercy, repels and holds with the high proud Pharisee: and therefore the most holy men we find in prayers most dejected and humiliated. David says, **"Oh Lord, our Savior, help us, be merciful unto our sins for thy own sake. Remember not our old iniquities. But have you O Lord, and let your mercy prevent us"** (Ps. 79:8). Jeremiah says, **"If our iniquities bear testimony against us, do according to your own name"** (Jer. 14:7), and behold Isaiah **"You are angry, O Lord, because we have sinned, and are replenished with all wickedness; and our justice is like a defiled cloth. But now, O Lord, you are our Father; we are clay, you are you the workman, and we are the workmanship or your hands: Be not angry, O Lord, remember not our iniquities forever"** (see Isa. 69:5-7). And Daniel, greatly commended of God, makes in his prayer most humble confession, in these words, **"We be sinners, and have offended; we have done ungodly, and have fallen from Thy commandment, therefore, not in our own righteousness make we**

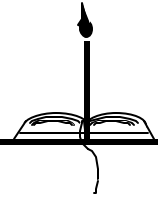
our prayers before You, but You must write and great mercies bring we forth for us. O Lord, hear! O Lord, be merciful and spare us! O Lord, attend, help and cease not; my God, even for Thy own name's sake, do it; for Your city and Your people are called after your own name" (Dan. 9:16-19). Behold that in these prayers is no mention of their own justice, their own satisfaction, or their own merits. But they consist of most humble confession, proceeding from a sorrowful and penitent heart; having nothing whereupon it might depend, but the free mercy of God alone, who had promised to be their God, (that is, their help, comfort, defender, and deliver), as He has also done to us by Jesus Christ in time of tribulation; and that they despair not, but after the acknowledging of their sins, call for mercy and obtain the same. Wherefore it is plain, that such men as, in their prayers have respect to any virtue proceeding of themselves, thinking thereby their prayers to be accepted, never prayed aright.

What Fasting and Good Deeds are with prayer: And albeit to fervent prayer be joint fasting, watching, and good deeds, yet are none of them the cause that God does accept our prayers; but they are spurs which suffer us not to vary, and make us more able to continue in prayer, which the mercy of God do accept. But here it may be objected, that David prayed, **"Keep my life O Lord, for I am holy; O Lord, save my soul, for I am innocent; and suffer me not to be consumed"** (see Ps. 86). Also Hezekiah, **"Remember Lord, I beseech you, that I have walked righteously before you and that I have wrought that which is good in your sight"** (see II Kings 20). These words are not spoken of men glorious, neither yet trusting in their own works. But herein they testify themselves to be sons of God, by regeneration, to whom He promises always to be merciful, and at all times to hear their prayers.

The cause of their boldness was Jesus Christ: And so their words sprung from a wanted, constant, and fervent faith, surely believing that as God of His infinite mercy had called them to His knowledge, not suffering them to walk after their own natural wickedness, but partly had taught them to conform them to His holy law, and that for the promises sake, so might He not leave them destitute of comfort, consolation, and defense in so great and extreme necessities. And so their justice alleged you not to glory thereof, or to put trust therein, but to strengthen and confirm them in God's promises. And this consolation I would wish all Christians have in their prayers: a testimony of a good conscience to assure them of God's promises. But to obtain what you ask must only depend upon Him, all opinion and thought of our own justice laid aside.

(This study will continue in the next issue, D.V.)

A Study in Psalms: Psalm 68:24-35



Psalm 68:24-35 – God Over All

- ²⁴Your procession has come into view, O God,
the procession of my God and King
into the sanctuary.
- ²⁵In front are the singers, after them the musicians;
with them are the maidens
playing tambourines.
- ²⁶Praise God in the great congregation;
praise the LORD in the assembly of Israel.
- ²⁷There is the little tribe of Benjamin, leading them,
there the great throng of Judah's princes,
and there the princes of
Zebulun and of Naphtali.
- ²⁸Summon Your power, O God;
show us Your strength,
O God, as You have done before.
- ²⁹Because of Your temple at Jerusalem
kings will bring You gifts.
- ³⁰Rebuke the beast among the reeds,
the herd of bulls among
the calves of the nations.
Humbled, may it bring bars of silver.
Scatter the nations who delight in war.
- ³¹Envoys will come from Egypt;
Cush will submit herself to God.
- ³²Sing to God, O kingdoms of the earth,
sing praise to the Lord, *Selah*
- ³³to Him who rides the ancient skies above,
who thunders with mighty voice.
- ³⁴Proclaim the power of God,
whose majesty is over Israel,
whose power is in the skies.
- ³⁵You are awesome, O God, in Your sanctuary;
the God of Israel gives power and strength
to His people.

Praise be to God!

Here we conclude our study of this psalm, in which David commemorates the bringing of the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem. This section begins with a description of the majestic procession: **“Your procession has come into view, O God, the procession of my God and King into the sanctuary. In front are the singers, after them the musicians; with them are the maidens playing tambourines. Praise God in the great congregation; praise the Lord in the assembly of Israel. There is the little tribe of Benjamin, leading them, there the great throng of Judah’s princes, and there the princes of Zebulun and of Naphtali”** (vss. 24–27). The procession is one of much pomp and celebration, as it should be. Our worship of God should be ostentatious, with nothing held back. There is no indication in the Bible that the worship of our great and loving God should be quiet and solemn. Here in this procession, we see **“singers”** and **“musicians”**, with **“maidens playing tambourines”**. We see everyone taking part, from the smallest tribe of **“Benjamin”** to the great tribe of **“Judah”**, from the most northern and most southern tribes of **“Zebulun”** and **“Naphtali”**. It truly must have been a great procession to have seen, stirring the witnesses to praise.

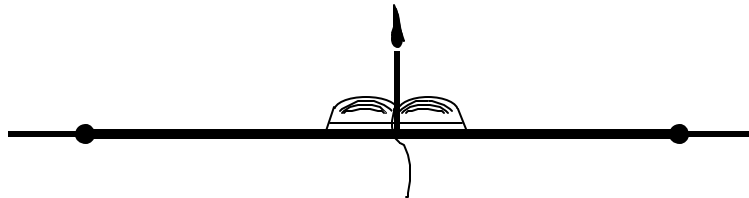
The procession, and the praises of God’s people, inspire David to ask that God reveal Himself to all the peoples of the earth: **“Summon Your power, O God; show us Your strength, O God, as You have done before. Because of Your temple at Jerusalem kings will bring You gifts”** (vss. 28–29). David looks ahead in faith to the time when the temple will be built by his son in Jerusalem. David prophesies: **“Because of Your temple at Jerusalem kings will bring You gifts.”** This prophecy of David’s came true. “The palace of God, which towered above Jerusalem, is prophesied as becoming a wonder to all lands, and when it grew from the tabernacle of David to the temple of Solomon, it was so. So splendid was that edifice that the queen of far off Sheba came with her gifts; and many neighboring princes, overawed by the wealth and power therein displayed, came with tribute to Israel’s God” [Spurgeon].

While some nations would come pay tribute to God through the splendor of the temple, others would need a more forceful show of His power. So David prays: **“Rebuke the beast among the reeds, the herd of bulls among the calves of the nations. Humbled, may it bring bars of silver. Scatter the nations who delight in war. Envoys will come from Egypt; Cush will submit herself to God”** (vss. 30–31). David prays that God would use His power to **“humble”** the aggressive nations, and **“scatter the nations who delight in war”**, for the purpose of turning them to God. He prophesies that **“envoys will come from Egypt;**

Cush will submit herself to God.” Cush was modern-day Ethiopia, so it is perhaps significant that “one of the first converts to Christianity from among the heathen was a great man of Ethiopia (see Acts 8:26ff)” [Plumer].

And it will be a great day when these prophecies are totally fulfilled, when all the nations submit to our great and good God. “Old foes shall be new friends. Solomon shall find a spouse in Pharaoh’s house. Christ shall gather a people from the realm of sin. Great sinners shall yield themselves to the spectre of grace, and great men shall become good men, by coming to God” [Spurgeon]. It will be a great day when all the peoples of the earth shall heed David’s exhortations to praise God: **“Sing to God, O kingdoms of the earth, sing praise to the Lord, to Him who rides the ancient skies above, who thunders with mighty voice. Proclaim the power of God, whose majesty is over Israel, whose power is in the skies”** (vss. 32–34). “All flesh should and shall praise God. Mighty kingdoms are no exception. Pure Christianity shall yet wonderfully and widely prevail on the earth. God has promised it and He will surely bring it to pass” [Plumer]. This “is not a simple telling of their duty, but a prophecy of their joyful joining in the worship of God, and that they shall have cause of joy within themselves to praise Him... The time shall come when the kingdoms of the earth shall turn Christians in profession, in a greater measure than yet hath been seen” [Dickson].

David concludes the psalm, hardly able to restrain himself, with an expression of praise from his own heart: **“You are awesome, O God, in Your sanctuary; the God of Israel gives power and strength to His people. Praise be to God!”** (vs. 35).



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A Christmas Hymn

A stable-lamp is lighted
Whose glow shall wake the sky;
The stars shall bend their voices,
And every stone shall cry,
And every stone shall cry,
And straw like gold shall shine;
A barn shall harbor heaven,
A stall become a shrine.

This child through David's city
Shall ride in triumph by;
The palm shall strew its branches,
And every stone shall cry,
And every stone shall cry,
Though heavy, dull, and dumb,
And lie within the roadway
To pave His kingdom come.

Yet He shall be forsaken,
And yielded up to die;
The sky shall groan and darken,
And every stone shall cry,
And every stone shall cry
For sorry hearts of men:
God's blood upon the spearhead,
God's love refused again.

But now, as at the ending,
The low is lifted high;
The stars shall bend their voices,
And every stone shall cry,
And every stone shall cry
In praises of the child
By whose descent among us
The worlds are reconciled.

-- Richard Wilbur

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