

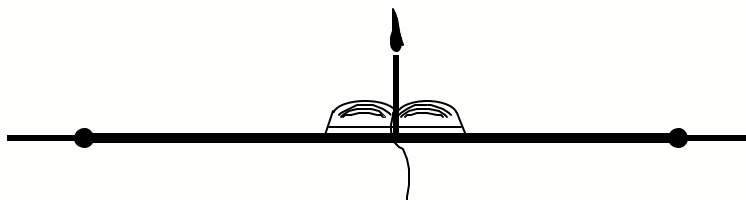
Scripture Studies

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

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May God bless you as you study His Word.



Old Testament Study: Exodus 11

The Death of the Firstborn, pt. 2 by Arthur W. Pink (1886-1952)

It now remains for us to say something about the spiritual condition of this people here so signally favored of God. Comparatively little is told us in the earlier chapters of Exodus concerning the relations which Abraham's descendants sustained toward Jehovah, but one or two details of information are supplied in the later scriptures. We propose, then, to bring these together that we may contemplate, briefly, the picture which they furnish us of the moral state of the Children of Israel at the time that the Lord delivered them from the House of Bondage.

In Leviticus 17:7 we read, "**And they shall no more offer their sacrifices unto demons unto whom they have gone a whoring**". Mark the words "**no more**": the implication is plain that previously to coming out into the wilderness, Israel had practiced idolatry. Plainer still is Joshua 24:14, "**Now therefore fear the Lord and serve Him in sincerity and in truth: and put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the flood, and in Egypt; and serve ye the Lord.**" Here we learn that the patriarchs served false gods before Jehovah called them, and that their descendants did the same thing in Egypt.

And the Lord says through Ezekiel: "**In the day that I lifted up my hand unto them, to bring them forth of the land of Egypt into a land that I had espied for them, flowing with milk and honey, which is the glory of all lands; then said I unto them, 'Cast ye away every man the abominations of his eyes, and defile not yourselves with the idols of Egypt; I am the Lord your God.' But they rebelled against Me, and would not hearken unto Me; they did not every man cast away the abominations of their eyes, neither did they forsake the idols of Egypt; then I said, 'I will pour out My fury upon them, to accomplish My anger against them, in the midst of the land of Egypt.' But I wrought for My name's sake that it should not be polluted before the heathen, among whom they were, in whose sight I made Myself known unto them, in bringing them forth out of the land of Egypt**" (Ezekiel 20:6-9). Very pointed is this, supplying us with information that is not furnished in the book of Exodus. First, this passage tells us that Israel worshiped the idols of Egypt. Second, it shows how God expostulated with them. Third, it informs us that Israel heeded not God's reproof, but instead, blatantly defied Him. Fourth, it intimates how that the earlier plagues were also visitations of judgment upon the Hebrews, as well as the Egyptians. Fifth, it shows that the Lord delivered Israel, not because of any worthiness or fitness He found in them, but simply for His

name's sake.

As we turn to the book of Exodus — everything in it being typical in its significance — we find how accurately the physical condition of the Israelites symbolized their spiritual state. First, they are seen in bondage, at the mercy of a cruel king, — apt portrayal of the condition of the natural man, the “**captive**” of the devil (2 Timothy 2:26). Second, we read that they “**sighed by reason of their bondage, and they cried**” (Ex. 2:23). But nothing is said about them crying unto God! They were conscious of their hard lot, but not yet did they know the Source from which their deliverance must proceed. How like the natural man, when he is first awakened by the Holy Spirit! His spiritual wretchedness, his lost condition, make him to sigh and groan, but as yet he is unacquainted with the Deliverer. Beautiful is it to mark what follows in Ex. 2:23: “**And their cry came up unto God by reason of the bondage**”. Yes, God heard their cry, even though it was not addressed to Himself. And God “**remembered His covenant**”. Ah, that was the ground of His action. Not their faith, for they had none. Nor was it pity for their wretchedness, for there were many others in different parts of the earth equally wretched, whom God ignored. God had respect to them for His covenant's sake. And it was precisely thus with us, Christian readers. God made a covenant with Christ before the foundation of the world and it was this, which made Him have “respect” unto us!

And what do we next read of in Exodus? This: that all unknown to the enslaved and groaning Israelites, God had raised up for them a savior. Exodus 3 records the appearing of Jehovah to Moses at the burning bush, and the appointing of him to be the deliverer of God's people. But at that time Israel knew it not; they were in total ignorance of the wondrous grace which God had in store for them. How truly accurate the picture! When we were first made conscious of our woeful condition, when our consciences groaned beneath the intolerable load of guilt, at that time we knew nothing of God's appointed Deliverer.

Next we are told of the Lord sending Aaron into the wilderness to meet his brother, and together they entered Egypt, gather the elders of Israel, and tell them of God's promised deliverance. We are told, “**And the people believed; and when they heard that the Lord had visited the children of Israel, and that He had looked upon their affliction, then they bowed their heads and worshipped**” (Ex. 4:31). But it is clear from what follows that this was not a genuine heart believing, and their worship was evidently very superficial. Nor does the analogy fail us here. How many of us became very religious when the Deliverer was first presented to our view! But, alas, how superficial was our response!

The sequel is very striking! As soon as Pharaoh learned of God's intentions toward Israel he at once increases their burdens and says, “**Let more work be laid upon the men**” (Ex. 5:9). How clearly Pharaoh foreshadows Satan here! As soon as the great Enemy of souls discerns the spirit of God commencing His operations of grace within the sinner, he makes the spiritual lot of that one more miserable than ever. He sets the poor soul to work the harder. He tells such an one that he must labor with increased zeal if ever he is to find favor with God. “**They were in evil case**” says the record (Ex. 5:19), and so is the poor guilt-burdened, conscience-smitten, convicted sinner.

Next, we read that the people came to Moses complaining of their

increased misery. Even now they did not put their trust in the Lord, but instead, leaned upon the arm of flesh. So, too, the convicted sinner — with very rare exceptions — instead of turning at once to Christ for relief, seeks out the Sunday-school teacher, the evangelist, or the pastor. Similarly did the “prodigal son” act. When he **“began to be in want”**, he did not return at once to the Father, but **“went and joined himself to a citizen of that country”** (Luke 15:15). How slow, how pathetically slow, is man to learn the great truth that God alone is able to meet his deep, deep need! Moses sought the Lord, and the Lord in tender patience bade His servant to go unto the Israelites and say, **“I am the Lord and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will rid you of their bondage, and I will redeem you with stretched out arm, and with great judgments; And I will take you to Me for a people, and I will be to you a God: and ye shall know that I am the Lord your God, which bringeth you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will bring you in unto the land, concerning the which I did swear to give it to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob; and I will give it you for an heritage: I am the Lord”** (Ex. 6:6-8). Wondrous grace was this! Sad indeed is what follows **“And Moses spake so unto the children of Israel, but they hearkened not unto Moses for anguish of spirit, and for cruel bondage”** (v. 9).

How this goes to show that their earlier bowing down and **“worshipping”** (4:31) was merely an evanescent thing of the moment. And again we say, How true to life is the picture presented here! While Israel groaned under the burdens of the brick-kilns of Egypt, even the promises of God failed to give relief. So it was with each of us. While we continued to justify ourselves by our own works, while we sought to weave a robe of righteousness by our own hands, even the promises of the Gospel failed to comfort us. Ah, it is not until the soul turns away from everything of self and puts his trust alone in the Finished Work of Christ, that peace will be obtained.

“To him that worketh not, but believeth on Him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness” (Romans 4:5). **“And Moses spake so unto the children of Israel: but they hearkened not unto Moses for anguish of spirit and for cruel bondage”** (Ex. 6:9). This is the last thing which we are told about the Israelites before the Angel of Death visited the land of Egypt. How clear it is then, that when the Lord **“put a difference between the Egyptians and the Israelites”** (Ex. 11:7), it was not because of any merit which He discovered in the latter. They, too, were idolaters, rebellious and unbelieving. The more clearly we perceive the spiritual wretchedness of Israel at this time, the more shall we recognize the absolute sovereignty of that grace which redeemed them. So, too, the more fully we are acquainted with the teaching of Scripture concerning the utter corruption and total depravity of the natural man, the more shall we be made to marvel at the infinite mercy of God toward such worthless creatures, and the more highly shall we value that wondrous love that wrought salvation for us. May the Holy Spirit impart to us an everdeepening realization of the terrible extent to which sin has “abounded”, and make us perceive with ever-increasing gratitude and joy the “superabounding” of grace.

A Classic Study: The Value of a Good Name



A Classic Study by Richard Greenham (1531–1591)

[Here we conclude a study by the esteemed servant of God, Richard Greenham.]—*Ed.*

Of a Good Name, pt. 4

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

Now because men do suffer very much discredit, and are very ill reported of among men, it shall be good to consider what profit and use we may make up such reproaches and evil reports. And this shall we do the better, if we know upon what grounds those reproaches do arise. First therefore we must learn, that men may be evil reported of, either for evil, or for well doing. When men therefore are ill spoken of, they must first consider whether it be for good or evil: and if it be for evil, then must they go a degree further, to find whether it be for some evil work which they have committed, or for some occasion which they have given. When a man is evil reported of for some evil deed which he hath done, that evil deed of his is either manifestly known, or else is it unknown. And surely it is a thing most common among men to suffer discredit for open and gross sins, yet very few do right profit by it: for some are shameless, and care not about what men say of them, and therefore indeed they are unfit to receive any profit by such reproaches. Therefore after the most sharp and secure censor of the church, they must be committed to the hand of the Magistrate, to be punished in the purse and in the body. And yet surely such is their sinful attitude, that there is small hope of their amendments: for it does often come to pass, that they which will not profit by the Church cannot receive profit by the Magistrate. Therefore after all this they must be left unto the Lord, to work if it be His will by some extraordinary means upon their hearts which are exceedingly hardened.

There are others who, being put to open shame, are sorrowful indeed: but this is because they have sustained open shame, rather than because they have sinned against the Lord. These are in some degree better than the former, and yet they go not so far as they ought to do. For the devil having bewitched them, does persuade them it is no such matter as men would make them believe it is, and that as a wonder lasts but nine days, so this shall be of no long continuance. Thus they are freed, so that the shame cannot enter into their hearts, there to work godly sorrow, which may bring forth unfeigned repentance.

This is the daily scene in unrepentant malefactors, who although they make large promises of amendment, yet the punishment being passed, they

fall into the like filthiness again. Some think that they do dissemble when they seem to repent, and deal deceitfully, but I think that they think as they speak, and speak with sorrow and grief. For will a thief purpose to steal again when he is ready to be hanged? Will a child purpose to play the wanton when he is being disciplined? I grant indeed there is hypocrisy in them, yet the gross hypocrisy whereby men labor to deceive others, is not in them, but the close and most dangerous hypocrisy whereby the devil has beguiled their own hearts through his subtlety. This witchery of the devil (I say) is the cause why many promising amendment, do not perform the same. Thus, we see how men do miss of that profit which ought to be reaped of the open shame: we therefore are to take a better course, and to labor, that as our faces do blush before men, so our souls may be confounded before the Lord, that being thoroughly humbled under his hand by godly sorrow, it may please Him in mercy to raise us up.

Now if we doubt in this case whether our sorrow be found or not, let us try it by these two rules. First whether we can with contented minds take the punishment as a correction from the Lord, and yet mourn and be grieved for the sin, and yet in such a manner, as giving place to God's justice in punishing, we labor for mercy in the forgiveness of sins. Secondly, whether when we could keep the sin close, we can yet with David freely confess and say, "**Against thee O Lord have I sinned!**" (Ps. 51:4). This if we can do, it is a sure argument that our sorrow is godly, and that we have well profited by that reproach which our sin did bring upon us.

As the sin is sometime so evident that it cannot be covered, so indeed the sin may be committed, and yet either not be known nor suspected at all, or else by probable suspicions. When the sin is in this case, the Lord may cause a man that has so sinned, to be accused or evil spoken of for that sin. Here the party offending must first learn to deal wisely and in such manner, as the sin may be kept close still, if it may be done without another sin. But if an oath of the Lord be required, then we ought to give God the glory, though it be with our own shame, and confess the fault. Secondly, for the profits which may be made by such reports, we must learn with thankful hearts to receive this merciful chastisement of the Lord, and acknowledge it to His praise: for He might have punished us for those sins which were manifest, yet He has passed over them. He might have made these known, but He spared our name and our credit. Therefore for a second fruit, this mercy of the Lord must lead us to repentance, and to an earnest sorrow for all our sins. For it is too gross that we should continue in sin because we cannot be convicted of sin: for if the Lord did not dislike my sin, why should He raise such a report of you? Why should He save your good name, if He were not minded to show you mercy? And if He would not have you with all your heart to repent you of your sin, why does He whip your naked conscience for sin? Therefore if by this loving kindness we be not led unto repentance, verily it will be a sin that shall not escape unpunished. Thus we have heard how an evil name does arise of sin committed, and what profit must be taken thereof.

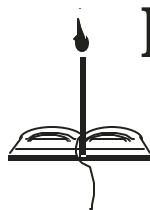
Now let us further consider how a man must profit by an evil name, not when he hath by some sin deserved it, but when he has only failed in this: that he has given occasion to be suspected of evil. This occasion is of the two sorts. First, when good duties are either altogether omitted, or do with a grudging mind. This report must teach thee, that although you be not so evil as men would make thee, yet you are not so good as you should

be. Therefore by this you must learn, as to be careful of doing good, so to do it with greater and better courage: for the Lord loves a cheerful giver.

The second occasion is inward, which although no man can find out, yet the Lord for thy good does cause men to speak evil of you for it. This inward occasion is when thy heart hath given some full consent to do evil, or at the least hath much wandered in thinking of it. Here the Lord does take thee betime, and suffers men to report of you that you have done that, which indeed you have not done, yet in thy heart you have taken pleasure in it. Then the way to profit by this is to confess the goodness of the Lord, who will not have you to fall into such sin, as might deserve discredit. For such is the nature of man, that if any evil thought do long tarry in the mind, it will hardly be restrained before it comes to the outward act. Again, by this report raised on us, we must take occasion to call back ourselves, if we have consented to evil, and with grief to be sorrowful for it: or if we have not as yet consented, we must labor to repress the heat of our affections, and quench them by the moisture of the word. And this much shall be sufficient for those reports which arise of some just ground and occasion.

The last point to be handled, is to see what use must be made of those reports which be altogether false, and have neither ground nor good beginning. For it may come to pass, when a man has avoided evil, and done good; when he has shunned the occasion of evil, and done all good with a cheerful heart, yet he may be ill reported of, and his good name hindered. Now if this does befall any man, he must know that it is the Lord's doings, and that the Lord does it either to correct sin, or else to prevent it. The Lord (I say) does by this means correct sin sometimes, either in the same kind, or in some other. In the same kind He deals thus, He suffers thee to be counted an adulterer, yet you do not live chastely, and hate filthy sin: but then He sees that you have either been an adulterer and have not repented at all (or if you have suddenly repented, yet now you begin to fail, and to cool in the hatred of that sin).

And to say all in one word, we shall never make true use of reports, until we have been brought to see and repent of some particular sin, which either we saw not before, or else had not thoroughly repented of. Furthermore, it may come to pass, that we having done all good duties, avoided all evil, and examined our repentance even for particular sins, yet shall we be evil spoken of among men. Here we must know that the Lord by reports do forewarn us of the evil to come. We are reported of to be of the family of love: hereby we are forewarned to take heed that we fall not into that sin, and so forth of other reports. When any such reports are carried about of us, we must be made so much the more wary, that we fall not into that sin. And according to the Apostles rule, we must labor to finish the course of our salutation in fear: which that we may do, The Lord grant for His Christ's sake, to Whom be praise forever in the church, **Amen.**



New Testament Study: Matthew 19:30-20:19

God's Grace

³⁰But many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first.

¹“For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire men to work in his vineyard. ²He agreed to pay them a denarius for the day and sent them into his vineyard.

³“About the third hour he went out and saw others standing in the marketplace doing nothing. ⁴He told them, ‘You also go and work in my vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.’ ⁵So they went.

“He went out again about the sixth hour and the ninth hour and did the same thing. ⁶About the eleventh hour he went out and found still others standing around. He asked them, ‘Why have you been standing here all day long doing nothing?’

⁷“‘Because no one has hired us,’ they answered.

“He said to them, ‘You also go and work in my vineyard.’

⁸“When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, ‘Call the workers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last ones hired and going on to the first.’

⁹“The workers who were hired about the eleventh hour came and each received a denarius. ¹⁰So when those came who were hired first, they expected to receive more. But each one of them also received a denarius. ¹¹When they received it, they began to grumble against the landowner. ¹²‘These men who were hired last worked only one hour,’ they said, ‘and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the work and the heat of the day.’

¹³“But he answered one of them, ‘Friend, I am not being unfair to you. Didn’t you agree to work for a denarius? ¹⁴Take your pay and go. I want to give the man who was hired last the same as I gave you. ¹⁵Don’t I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?’

¹⁶“So the last will be first, and the first will be last.”

¹⁷Now as Jesus was going up to Jerusalem, He took the twelve disciples aside and said to them, ¹⁸“We are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and the teachers of the law. They will condemn Him to death ¹⁹and will turn Him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified. On the third day He will be raised to life!”

Jesus had just been telling the Twelve disciples of the rewards in store for them, for following Him. However, the disciples were speaking as if the rewards were in direct proportion to what they had done. Peter had said: **“We have left everything to follow you! What *then* will there be for us?”** (Matt. 19:27). Now here, in Matthew 20, Jesus tells a parable that points out that the rewards for those who follow Him are allotted according to God’s grace, not according to man’s expectations: **“But many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first”** (Matt. 19:30).

Jesus begins the parable: **“For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire men to work in his vineyard. He agreed to pay them a denarius for the day and sent them into his vineyard”** (vss. 1-2). In the parable, the **“landowner”** represents God, as He seeks people to do His work, in **“the vineyard”**. Those who serve God are promised in the Bible to be rewarded, just as the **“landowner”** agreed to pay the workers **“a denarius for the day”**. A **“denarius”** was the generally accepted wage for a full day’s work.

Let us point out here that the workers who were chosen early must have felt fortunate. They were assured of wages for the day. And indeed, when called for work in the Kingdom of Heaven, “it is a choice privilege to be allowed to begin holy service early in the morning... Young believers have a blessed prospect: they may well be happy to do good work, in a good place, for a good Master, and on good terms” [Spurgeon, 273].

The parable continues: **“About the third hour he went out and saw others standing in the marketplace doing nothing. He told them, ‘You also go and work in my vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.’ So they went”** (vs. 3). There is something interesting in the way this parable is told. Note that it does not say that the **“landowner”** was desperate for workers, and that that was the reason more workers were hired. Rather, it says that there were people **“standing in the marketplace doing nothing”**, and so, the landowner hired them. This is the way of the Kingdom of Heaven. God does not *need* us. He is sovereign, and His work will get done. But by His grace, He asks us to serve Him, so that our lives would have meaning and fulfillment, so that we would not spend our lives **“standing in the marketplace doing nothing.”** In the Kingdom, work is better than idleness. It

gives meaning to life. "They would work only three-quarters of a day; but it was for their good to cease from loafing at the street corner" [Spurgeon, 274]. "Till we are hired into the service of God, we are standing all the day idle; a sinful state, though a state of drudgery to Satan, may really be called a state of idleness; sinners are doing nothing, nothing to purpose, nothing of the great work they were sent into the world about, nothing that will pass well in the account" [Henry].

The landowner continued to find idle workers in the marketplace: **"He went out again about the sixth hour and the ninth hour and did the same thing. About the eleventh hour he went out and found still others standing around. He asked them, 'Why have you been standing here all day long doing nothing?' 'Because no one has hired us,' they answered. He said to them, 'You also go and work in my vineyard.'" (vss. 5-7).** The calling of the workers later in the day symbolizes the calling of men to serve God later in life. "God in the greatness of His love calls into His service men from whom the exuberance of useful vigor has departed; He accepts the waning hours of their day. He has work for the weak as well as for the strong. He allows none to labor for Him without the reward of grace, even though they have spent their best days in sin" [Spurgeon, 274].

"When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, 'Call the workers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last ones hired and going on to the first.' The workers who were hired about the eleventh hour came and each received a denarius. So when those came who were hired first, they expected to receive more. But each one of them also received a denarius. When they received it, they began to grumble against the landowner. 'These men who were hired last worked only one hour,' they said, 'and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the work and the heat of the day.' But he answered one of them, 'Friend, I am not being unfair to you. Didn't you agree to work for a denarius? Take your pay and go. I want to give the man who was hired last the same as I gave you. Don't I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous'" (vss. 8-15). I dare say that there is not one of us who does not sympathize a bit with the complaining workers. It is the way of the world of commerce (and rightly so), that the one who works the hardest and longest should receive the higher wages. However, the Kingdom of Heaven is not the kingdom of this world, and is certainly not a kingdom based on the rules of commerce. This is the point of the parable. The Kingdom of Heaven is based on the grace of God. It is based on God saying, **"I want to give..."** (vs. 14). God, in His sovereignty, doles out rewards, as only He sees fit. "God acts toward us in sheer grace. Don't think of salvation being an arithmetical process, adding up the good deeds and the bad ones and coming out with salvation or loss

according to whether the balance is on the credit or debit side. That is not the way to understand the dealings of a gracious God" [Morris, 499]. And certainly, the one who receives even the least reward from God is very well paid. We deserve nothing from Him. No amount of work we do will make Him a debtor to us. He has already given us so much.

The landowner rebukes the complaining workers: "**Or are you envious because I am generous?**" (vs. 15). We must never be envious of the work of God's grace in another person's life. Rather, we should praise God for His work of grace in all of our lives. "There is a great proneness in us to think that we have too little, and others too much, of the tokens of God's favor; and that we do too much, and others too little, in the work of God. Very apt we all are to undervalue the deserts of others, and to overvalue our own" [Henry]. "Let us never envy late converts their joy or their usefulness, but applaud the sovereignty which blesses them so largely. We share the mercy with them; let us give them an equal portion of our joy" [Spurgeon, 278].

Jesus sums up the parable: "**So the last will be first, and the first will be last**" (vs. 16). In other words, we should not expect the Kingdom of Heaven to follow the ways of the world. The unexpected will happen.

Next, Jesus once again works to prepare the disciples for what was to happen: "**Now as Jesus was going up to Jerusalem, He took the twelve disciples aside and said to them, 'We are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and the teachers of the law. They will condemn Him to death and will turn Him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified. On the third day He will be raised to life!'**" (vss. 17-19). Jesus did not want His Twelve disciples to be unprepared for what was to happen, and so He often attempted to prepare them for it (see also Matt. 16:21; 17:22ff). Also, by stating the details of what was to happen, Jesus was declaring His supernatural foreknowledge of His death and resurrection. He is letting His disciples know that what was to happen would not be a surprise to Him. This also demonstrates "the resolute willingness of the Redeemer to suffer for us; for He knew all that He was to suffer, and was never dashed" [Dickson]. Foreknowledge of what was to happen could have only made Christ's suffering even harsher, and more drawn out. Yet, He willingly chose to go through with His sacrifice. And make no mistake, it was his *choice*. "The Lord Jesus was a voluntary sufferer. When He died on the cross, it was not because He had not power to prevent it: He suffered intentionally, deliberately, and of His own free will" [Ryle]. As Jesus Himself said: "**No one takes [my life] from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again**" (John 10:18).

Note one more thing: they were "**going to Jerusalem.**" It is ironic, and sad, that at the center of Jewish worship, Jerusalem, the crucifixion of the Messiah would take place.



A Topical Study: On Prayer

[Here we continue a series on Prayer. This is a continuation of 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 by John Knox, Preacher of God's Holy Word.']—*Ed.*

The True Nature of Prayer, pt. 2 by John Knox (1505-1572)

Hypocrisy is not allowed with God – In Prayer, it is to be observed, that what we ask of God, we must earnestly desire the same, acknowledging our ourselves to be void thereof; and that God alone may grant the petition of our hearts, when His good will and pleasure is. For nothing is more odious before God than hypocrisy and dissimulation; that is, when men do ask of God things whereof they have no need, or that they believe to obtain by others than God alone. For instance, if a man ask of God remission of his sins, thinking nevertheless to obtain the same by his own works, or by other men's merits, he does mock God and deceive himself. And in such cases do a great number offend, principally the mighty and rich of the earth, who, for a common custom will pray this part of the Lord's prayer, "**Give us this day our daily bread,**" that is, a moderate and reasonable sustentation. And yet their own hearts will testify that they need not so to pray, seeing they abound in all worldly solace and felicity. I mean not that rich men should not pray this part of prayer, but I would they understood what they ought to pray in it, (whereof I intend after to speak), and that they ask nothing whereof they felt not themselves marvelous indignant and needful. For unless we call in truth, we shall not be granted; and except we speak with our whole heart, we shall not find Him.

The fourth rule necessary to be following in Prayer is, A sure hope to obtain what we ask. For nothing more offends God than when we ask, while doubting whether He will grant our petitions; for in so doing we doubt if God be true, if He be mighty and good. Those who don't (says James) obtain nothing from God (see James 1:6); and therefore Jesus Christ commands that we firmly believe to obtain whatsoever we ask for all things are possible to him who believes. And therefore, in our prayers

always is to be desperation. I mean not that any man in extremity of trouble can be without a present dolor, and without a greater fear of trouble to follow.

Troubles are the spurs to stir us to pray – Trouble and fear are very spurs to prayer. For when a man compasses about with vehement calamities, and vexed with continual solitude, having by help of man, no hope of deliverance, with a sore oppressed and punishing heart, fearing also greater punishment to follow, from the deep pit of tribulation does he call to God for comfort and support. Such prayer ascends into God's presence and returns not in vain.

God delivers His own from trouble and enemies – As David, in the vehement persecution of Saul, hunted and chased from every hold, fearing that one day or other he should fall into the hands of his persecutors, after he had complained that no place of rest was left to him, vehemently prayed, saying **“O Lord, who is my God, in whom I only trust, save me from them that persecute me, and deliver me from my enemies. Let not this man”** (meaning Saul) **“devour my life, as a lion does to his prey for of none seek I comfort but of you alone”** (Ps. 7:1, 2);

In the midst of this anguish the goodness of God sustains him, that the present tribulation was tolerable, and the infallible promises of God so assured him of deliverance, that fear was partly mitigated and gone, as plainly apparent to such as diligently marks the process of his prayers. For after long menacing and threatening made to him of his enemy, he concluded with these words, **“The dolor which he intended for me shall fall upon his own plate; and the violence wherewith he would have oppressed me shall cast down on his own head. But I will magnify the Lord according to his justice, and shall praise the name of the Most Highest”** (Ps. 7:16,17). This is not written for David only, but for all such shall suffer tribulation to the end of the world. For I, the writer hereof, (let this be said to the laud and praise of God alone), in anguish of mind and vehement tribulation and affliction, called to the Lord when not only the ungodly, but even my faithful Brother, yea, and my own self, that is all natural understanding, judges my cause to be irremediable. And yet in my greatest calamity, and when my pains were most cruel, would His eternal wisdom that my hands should write far contrary to the judgement of carnal reason, which His mercy has proved true. Blessed be His holy name! And therefore dare I be bold, in the truth of God's Word, to promise that notwithstanding the vehemence of trouble, the long continuance thereof, the desperation of all men, the fearfulness, danger, dolor, and anguish of our own hearts, yet if we call constantly to God, that beyond expectation of all men, He shall deliver.

Where Constant Prayer is, there the petition is granted – Let no

man think himself unworthy to call and pray to God because he has grievously offended his Majesty in times past; but let him bring to God a sorrowful and repenting heart, saying with David, **“Heal my soul, O Lord, for I have offended against Thee”** (Ps. 41:4). Before I was afflicted, I transgressed, but now let me observe your commandments. To mitigate or ease the sorrows of our wounded conscience, two plasters hath our most prudent Physician provided to give us encouragement to pray (notwithstanding the knowledge of offences committed), that is, a precept and a promise. The precept or commandment to pray is universal, frequently inculcate and repeated in God’s scriptures: **“Ask, and it shall be given to you”** (Matt. 7:7); **“Call upon me in the day of trouble”** (Ps. 50:15); **“Watch and pray that you fall not into temptation”** (Matt. 26:41); **“I command that you pray without ceasing”** (I Thess. 5:17); **“Give thanks in all things”** (I Thess. 5:18). Those who condemn or despise these commandments do equally sin with him that does it still. And God requires equal obedience of and to all His commandments. Yet more boldly will I say, he who, when necessity constrains, desires not support and help of God, does provoke His wrath no less than such as make false gods, or openly deny God.

He that prays not, when in trouble, denies God – For like as it is to know no physician or medicine, or in knowing them refuse to use their service the same. So not to call upon God in your tribulation, is like as if you did not know God, or else utterly deny Him.

Not to pray is a sin most odious – O! Why cease we then to call instantly to His mercy, having His commandment so to do? Above all our iniquities, we work manifest contempt and despising of Him, when, by negligence, we delay to call for His gracious support. Who does call upon God obeys His will, and finds therein no small consolation, knowing nothing is more acceptable to His majesty than humble obedience.

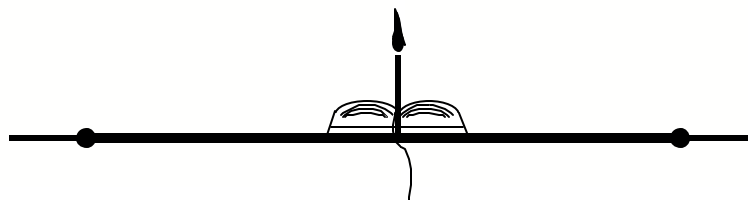
To this commandment, He adds His most undoubted promise in many places, **“Ask, and you shall receive; seek and you shall find”** (Matt. 7:7). And by the Prophet Jeremiah, God says, **“You shall call upon me, and I shall hear you”** (Jer. 29:12) and **“You shall seek and shall find me”** (Jer. 29:13). And by Isaiah, He says, **“May the father forget his natural son, or the mother the child of her womb? And although they do, it shall I not forget such as call upon me”** (Isa. 49:15). And hereto correspond and agree the words of Jesus Christ saying, **“If you being wicked can give good gifts to you children, much more my heavenly Father shall give the Holy Ghost to them that ask Him”** (Matt. 7:11). And that we should not think God to absent, or not to hear us, accuses Moses, saying, **“There is no nation that have their God’s so adherent, or near unto them as our God, which is present**

in all our prayers" (Deut. 4:7). Also the Psalmist, "**Near is the Lord unto all that call upon Him in truth**" (Ps. 145:18). And Christ says, "**Whosoever two or three gather together in my name, there am I in the midst of them**" (Matt. 18:20).

Readiness of God to hear sinners - That we shall not think God will not hear us, Isaiah says, "**Before you cry I shall hear, and while they speak I shall answer**" (Isa. 65:24), and also, "**If at evening come sorrow or calamity, before the morning spring I shall reduce and bring gladness**" (Isa. 17:14). And these most comfortable words, does the Lord speak not to carnal Israel only, but to all men sorely oppressed, abiding in God's deliverance: "**For a moment and a little, some have I turned my face from thee, but in everlasting mercy shall I comfort thee**" (Isa. 54:8).

The hope to obtain our petitions should depend upon the promises of God - O! Hard are the hearts whom so manifold, most sweet and sure promises do not mollify. These promises should give us hope to obtain our petitions. The indignity or unworthiness of ourselves is not to be regarded; for albeit to the chosen which are departed in holiness and purity of life, we be far inferior, yet in that part we are equal, in that we have the same commandment to pray, and the same promises to be had. For His Gracious Majesty does not grant the petition for any dignity of the person that prays, but for His promises sake only; and therefore says David, "**You have promised unto your servant, O Lord, that you will build a house for him, wherefore thy servant has found in his heart to pray in thy sight, now even so O Lord, you are God, and your words are true. Though he's spoken these things unto thy servant, begin therefore to do according to thy promise; multiply O Lord, the household of thy servant**" (II Sam. 7:27-29). Behold, David altogether depended upon God's promise. As also did Jacob, who after he had confessed himself unworthy of all the benefits reserved, yet did he ask greater benefits in time to come, and he did that because God had promised. In the like manner, let us be encouraged to ask whatsoever the goodness of God hath freely promised. What we should ask principally, we shall hereafter declare.

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





A Study in Psalms: Psalm 69:1-18

Psalm 69:1-18 - A Prayer in Desperate Times

For the director of music. To [the tune of] "Lilies." Of David.

- ¹Save me, O God,
for the waters have come up to my neck.
²I sink in the miry depths,
where there is no foothold.
I have come into the deep waters;
the floods engulf me.
³I am worn out calling for help;
my throat is parched.
My eyes fail, looking for my God.
⁴Those who hate me without reason
outnumber the hairs of my head;
Many are my enemies without cause,
those who seek to destroy me.
I am forced to restore what I did not steal.
⁵You know my folly, O God;
my guilt is not hidden from You.
⁶May those who hope in You not be disgraced
because of me, O Lord, the LORD Almighty;
May those who seek You not be put to shame
because of me, O God of Israel.
⁷For I endure scorn for Your sake,
and shame covers my face.
⁸I am a stranger to my brothers,
an alien to my own mother's sons;
⁹for zeal for Your house consumes me,
and the insults of those who insult you
fall on me.
¹⁰When I weep and fast,
I must endure scorn;
¹¹when I put on sackcloth,
people make sport of me.
¹²Those who sit at the gate mock me,
and I am the song of the drunkards.

¹³But I pray to You, O LORD,
in the time of Your favor;
In Your great love, O God,
answer me with Your sure salvation.

¹⁴Rescue me from the mire,
do not let me sink;
Deliver me from those who hate me,
from the deep waters.

¹⁵Do not let the floodwaters engulf me
or the depths swallow me up
or the pit close its mouth over me.

¹⁶Answer me, O LORD,
out of the goodness of Your love;
In Your great mercy turn to me.

¹⁷Do not hide Your face from Your servant;
answer me quickly, for I am in trouble.

¹⁸Come near and rescue me;
redeem me because of my foes.

This psalm is a prayer offered up by David in a time of hopelessness. We are not told specifically what occasion in David's life inspired this psalm. Indeed, there were many events in David's life that could have inspired it, for he led a life full of trouble.

We learn from reading the New Testament, that David, in this psalm, was speaking prophetically in the role of Jesus Christ (in theology, we say that David was a *type* of Jesus in this psalm). This psalm is applied to Jesus numerous times in the New Testament (see Matt. 27:34,48; Mark 15:23; John 2:17; John 15:25; John 19:28,29; Acts 1:16,20; Rom. 11:9-10). Certainly, David thought he was speaking for himself, and this psalm no doubt was written on the occasion of one of his many times of trials. However, the Holy Spirit also inspired David in such a way that this psalm in many parts could also apply to Christ. "His footprints all through this sorrowful song have been pointed out by the Holy Spirit in the New Testament, and therefore we believe, and are sure, that the Son of Man is here" [Spurgeon]. "There is no Psalm, except for the twenty-second, more distinctly applied to Jesus in the New Testament" [Alexander].

David begins: "**Save me, O God, for the waters have come up to my neck. I sink in the miry depths, where there is no foothold. I have come into the deep waters; the floods engulf me**" (vs. 1-2). The psalm opens with a phrase uttered by many a believer throughout the ages: "**Save me, O God.**" "The very best of men may be in extreme danger. That is a good reason for looking to God, and hoping in His mercy" [Plumer, 685]. "A child of God may, in his own sense, be very near to perishing, and yet must not, in the most desperate condition, cease to pray, nor cease to hope for delivery prayed for" [Dickson, 411].

When speaking of **“the miry depths”**, David speaks in a metaphor that reflects the hopelessness of his situation. He paints a picture of one sinking in the mud, while standing in a river. There is **“no foothold”** in the mud, and so there is no way to reverse the sinking as the waters of the river rise. In such hopeless situations, one can only turn to God.

Jesus faced one such situation. While on the cross, the weight of the world’s sins was placed on Him. What an impossible burden for anyone to bear! Like David in the hopeless situation, Jesus cried out to His Father in Heaven. We are told in the book of Hebrews: **“During the days of Jesus’ life on earth, He offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save Him from death, and He was heard because of His reverent submission”** (Heb. 5:7). Jesus’ **“loud cries and tears”** are typified by David, as he cries to God for help, fervently and unceasing: **“I am worn out calling for help; my throat is parched. My eyes fail, looking for my God”** (vs. 3).

David speaks of his enemies: **“Those who hate me without reason outnumber the hairs of my head; many are my enemies without cause, those who seek to destroy me. I am forced to restore what I did not steal”** (vs. 4). David, in this situation, apparently was innocent, for he was hated **“without reason”**. These words apply even more to Jesus, who of course was completely without sin. Jesus, during His time on earth, unselfishly and unceasingly traveled around, **“teaching in the synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people”** (Matt. 4:23). Those who hated Jesus, did not hate Him for any wrong He did to them, but because they did not want to accept His message. This is true even today. People of the world have an unreasonable hatred of the name of Jesus, though Jesus did only good, and even laid down His life for their sakes. They hate Jesus because of the message of repentance He brought. As Jesus said: **“This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed”** (John 3:19–20). And truly, those who hate Jesus, as David said, **“outnumber the hairs on my head.”** Those who hate Jesus are rife, coming from all walks of life. “Both civilians and military, laics and clerics, doctors and drunkards, princes and people, set themselves against the Lord’s anointed... The hosts of earth and hell, band together, make up vast legions of antagonists, none of whom have any just ground for hating Him” [Spurgeon].

Though David’s enemies had no reason to hate him, David knew that he was not innocent in God’s sight: **“You know my folly, O God; my guilt is not hidden from You”** (vs. 5). “Even when, as to men’s unjust accusations, we plead ‘Not guilty’, yet, before God, we must acknowledge ourselves to have deserved all that is brought upon us, and much worse” [Henry]. Now, we have seen that many statements in this psalm

can be applied to Christ. One might think that, because Jesus was sinless, this verse could not apply to Him. Yet, when Jesus was on the cross, He bore all the sins of the world. As Paul taught: **“God made Him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God”** (II Cor. 5:21). “The sins of those for whom Christ died, by being imputed to Him, no doubt became His in the eyes of the law, in such a sense as to make Him answerable for them” [Anderson, in Spurgeon]. On the cross, as He bore our sins, Jesus felt all the guilt and shame that sin brings. So, at that time, Jesus could speak on our behalf: **“You know my folly, O God; my guilt is not hidden from You.”** This was the great gift that Jesus gave us. He bore our guilt, and endured the full wrath of God, the wrath that we deserved.

Next, David prays that he would bear up well under his trial: **“May those who hope in You not be disgraced because of me, O Lord, the LORD Almighty; may those who seek You not be put to shame because of me, O God of Israel. For I endure scorn for Your sake, and shame covers my face”** (vss. 6–7). David was concerned that his actions as he endured affliction might bring **“shame”** and **“disgrace”** on others. So he prayed that he might endure his trials as a godly man should: with courage, knowing that God is in control; with righteousness, not compromising virtue in the face of pain; with steadfastness, always looking to God for strength. We all should have this same concern. Our actions are being watched and studied by others, in light of our faith in God. We are witnesses for God, for good or for bad, in everything we do. If we act disgracefully, this brings **“disgrace”** and **“shame”** on all believers.

These verses can also be applied to Christ. He **“endured scorn”** as He did the Father’s will; He was **“shamed”** by even the act (deity though He is) of humbling Himself and becoming a man. Then also, He was further **“shamed”** by the horrible scourging He endured, culminating in His execution on the cross, between two thieves. Of course, Jesus bore Himself up very well under the affliction of the cross, even to the extent that He prayed for the forgiveness of His persecutors.

David speaks next of the scorn he faced because of his strong faith in God: **“I am a stranger to my brothers, an alien to my own mother’s sons; for zeal for Your house consumes me, and the insults of those who insult You fall on me. When I weep and fast, I must endure scorn; when I put on sackcloth, people make sport of me. Those who sit at the gate mock me, and I am the song of the drunkards”** (vss. 8-12). One proof that there is a spiritual war actively in process is the unreasonable hatred that comes on those who are **“zealous”** in doing God’s work. You can freely speak to others about the weather, about sports, even about Buddha and Confucius, but if you so much as mention the name of Jesus Christ, many people will become outraged. If you demonstrate a **“zeal”** and enjoyment for the worship of God, invariably **“insults”** will **“fall on you”**, as they did on David. “Zeal for God is so

little understood by men of the world, that it always draws down opposition upon those who are inspired with it; they are sure to be accused of sinister motives, or of hypocrisy, or of being out of their senses... [In the world], virtue is accounted vice; truth, blasphemy; wisdom, folly" [Spurgeon]. "In affliction for God's cause friends will more readily forsake a sufferer, than in his affliction for a civil cause" [Dickson, 414]. However, we must not let the scorn of the people deter us from doing the work of God, lest we lose the spiritual war. "Though we may be jeered for well-doing, we must never be jeered out of it" [Henry].

These verses also apply to Jesus. John tells us that Jesus' clearing of the Temple of the moneychangers was a fulfillment of the verse: "**Zeal for Your house consumes me**" (see John 2:17). Also, Jesus was "**a stranger to His brothers**" (the Jews), and also "**an alien to His own mother's sons**": John tells us that "**even His own brothers did not believe in Him**" (John 7:5). "The Jews (His brethren in race) rejected Him, His family (His brethren by blood) were offended at Him, His disciples (His brethren in spirit) forsook Him and fled; one of them sold Him, and another denied Him with oaths and cursings. Alas, my Lord, what pangs must have smitten Thy loving heart to be thus forsaken by those who should have loved Thee, defended Thee, and, if need be, died for Thee" [Spurgeon].

Despite being forsaken by his "**brothers**", David has a place to turn for help, to his loving God: "**But I pray to You, O Lord, in the time of Your favor; in Your great love, O God, answer me with Your sure salvation. Rescue me from the mire, do not let me sink; deliver me from those who hate me, from the deep waters**" (vss. 13-14). "The best way to bear out the persecution of the mighty and the mockery of the base multitude, is to be frequent in prayer to God for our part" [Dickson, 416]. Men are fickle, anyway, limited in the desire and ability to help. From only God comes "**sure salvation**".

David realizes that any help he gets from God stems from God's love and mercy, and is not a reward for any merits of David himself: "**Do not let the floodwaters engulf me or the depths swallow me up or the pit close its mouth over me. Answer me, O Lord, out of the goodness of Your love; in Your great mercy turn to me. Do not hide Your face from Your servant; answer me quickly, for I am in trouble. Come near and rescue me; redeem me because of my foes**" (vss. 15-18). It is smart to appeal to God's love and mercy. We must realize that we deserve nothing from God. We would do well to have these words on our lips, as we pray for help in times of trouble: "**Answer me, O Lord, out of the goodness of Your love; in Your great mercy turn to me.**"

A Meditation: The Spiritual Chemist



A Meditation Upon Strength and Length in Prayer by William Spurstowe (ca. 1666)

When Cicero was asked which of Demosthenes Orations he thought best, he wittily replied, "The longest." But, if the question should be, which Prayers are the best, the answer then must not be the longest, but the strongest: not the prayer that exceeds in quantity, but that which excels in quality. In moral actions, the manner of working is a swaying circumstance; a man may sin in doing good, but not in doing well: How few then are there which manage this duty of holy prayer aright? Some mistake the language of prayer, and think it consists of nothing else than the clothing of their meaning in apt expressions, with a tunable delivery of it. Others presume that, if necessity has put an edge upon their requests, and stirred up some passions of self-love, that they cannot fail of acceptance. Others again put much in the length of their prayers, measuring them by the time which is spent, rather than by the intention which is exercised in them. The prayer, which is as delightful music in God's ears, is not that which hath the quaint notes of the nightingale, but that which hath the mournful tones of the dove. Broken sighs and groans are the best eloquence with God, and become prayer, as unexpected stops and rests (made by musicians) do grace the music with a kind of harmonical ellipsis. It is not the prayer that indigency and natural desires do sharpen, but which the Spirit doth enliven that is prevalent with God. The one is as the cry of the young ravens, and the other is as the voice of children that are taught to cry, "Abba, Father." It is not the many words of a proud Pharisee that obtains the blessing, but the pithy and short confession of a penitent publican who is sent away justified. "Ah Father!" may sometimes be more effectual with God, who searcheth the hearts, and knoweth the mind of the Spirit, than a prayer that is stretched forth like an evening shadow to a wonderful length. The one, though it be short, may like a small figure in a number, stand for much: and the other, though great, like a volume of ciphers, may signify nothing. Let therefore such who are frequent in the duty of prayer, especially young converts who are apt to think above what is meet of their own enlargements, endeavor to turn their length into strength, and to remember that there is a wide difference between the gift and grace of prayer, and that it is one thing to have commerce with God in duties, and another to have communion with Him. The one is such which strangers may have in their mutual traffic, but the other is proper to friends, who are knit together in love.

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Prayers Contrasted

"The Christian in prayer comes up close to God, with a humble boldness of faith, and takes hold of Him, wrestles with Him; yea, will not let Him go without a blessing, and all this in the face of his own sins, and divine justice, which let fly upon him from the fiery mouth of the law; while the non-Christian's boldness in prayer is but a child's, either of ignorance in his mind, or harness in his heart; whereby not feeling his sins, and not knowing his danger, he rushes upon duty with a blind confidence, which soon quails when conscience awakes, and gives him the alarm, that his sins are upon him, as the Philistines on Samson: alas, then in a fright the poor-spirited wretch throws down his weapon, flies the presence of God with guilty Adam, and dares not look Him in the face."

-- William Gurnall (1617-1679)

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