

THE ISRAEL OF GOD ¹⁾

Part 4

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THE MEANING AND PLACE OF PRAYER ²⁾

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THE OBJECT OF HIS TRAVAIL

In this concluding message, beyond bringing forward a number of fragments from the Word of God, I shall do little more than make some statements, and leave the Lord to speak out of those statements Himself. The message itself will lie deeper than anything that can be said.

First of all, we will recall the passage that has been running through this whole series:

“Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise him; he hath put him to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand. He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied” (Isaiah 53:10,11).

Then:

“Who hath heard such a thing? who hath seen such things? Shall a land be born in one day? shall a nation be brought forth at once? for as soon as Zion travailed, she brought forth her children” (Isaiah 66:8).

“So the angel that talked with me said unto me, Cry thou, saying, Thus saith the Lord of hosts: I am jealous for Jerusalem and for Zion with a great jealousy” (Zechariah 1:14).

“And the word of the Lord of hosts came to me, saying, Thus saith the Lord of hosts: I am jealous for Zion with great jealousy, and I am jealous for her with great fury” (Zechariah 8:1,2).

“But ye are come unto mount Zion” (Hebrews 12:22).

(Note those two statements: “I am jealous for Zion”; “Ye are come unto mount Zion”.)

“And he saith unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful even unto death... And he went forward a little, and fell on the ground, and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass away from him. And he said, Abba, Father, all things are possible unto thee; remove this cup from me: howbeit not what I will, but what thou wilt” (Mark 14:34-36).

“Christ ... loved the church, and gave himself up for it” (Ephesians 5:25).

Its infinite value to God

All these passages, in principle and in ultimate meaning, relate to one thing. In them and by them certain things, in themselves altogether inexpressible, incomprehensible, are somehow brought to our hearts. In the first place, you notice that they all have to do with the travailing love of God in Christ, the passion of God in Christ. Therein lies a mystery — the mystery of the infinite value of the object of His travail. There *must* be something that justifies it; there must be something of unspeakable preciousness to Him that would lead to this — the travail of His soul. “My soul is exceeding sorrowful even unto death.” “I am jealous for Zion with a great jealousy ... I am jealous for her with great wrath.” Because of this tearing of the heart of God to its very depths, something of infinite preciousness and value must be in view.

Of course this is all centred in the Cross, as we know. The Cross forms the link with that which is of eternal, supreme importance to the Son of God; it links with His inheritance in the saints. It is not some inanimate, insensate “thing”; it is not that God has an objective interest in some *thing*. It is quite clear that a heart-relationship is here involved — the kind of thing that just tears your very being to pieces. It is as though this inheritance were a very part of Himself. That is borne out, as you will see, by these Scriptures. Not to have it would mean that a very part of Himself would be missing. It is a heart matter, a soul matter; it is something that touches all the sensibilities of God. The inheritance is, in fact, a *living* thing. Paul speaks of it as corresponding to the wife. “Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself up for it”; and the law that governs the husband-wife relationship is: “And they twain shall become one flesh” (Matt. 19:5). Divide them, and you tear apart and in pieces something that is one thing; and that is the relationship here. But, of course, such a character transcends any human analogy. We are here touching the eternal.

All this, then, about His love, His suffering, His travail, His anguish, at least implies, if it does not declare with a very loud voice, that the object of it all is of infinite value to Him. What is it? “He shall see *his seed* ... He shall see of the travail of his soul.” It is this of which we have been thinking all through these messages; this that is represented by that phrase, “his seed” — a people for Himself. It is beyond us, altogether beyond us. We might hear it, and have some kind of objective acceptance of it as truth — yes: but the wonder is that this comes right down to us — to you, to me. *We* are in this. It is a question of the infinite preciousness and value that you and I are to Him. It is beyond us.

Our difficulty in believing it

That is one thing — I speak at least for myself over this — one thing that gives the greatest difficulty to believe when it comes to oneself. Is it not so? Perhaps there are two things, in the main, that constitute our difficulty in believing a thing like this.

The first is, just what we are in ourselves. We know something of ourselves — our sinfulness, our worthlessness. When it is really true, and not put on — not just language, not feigned or pretended, but really true — that we know

our utter worthlessness, realise how abjectly worthless we are; and then we are told that all this is true, that it relates to and applies to *us*: ah, then we are presented with a problem; we are called upon to believe something that is not easy to believe! But I could take you through the Bible and show you how, after all, it is so. I wonder what you find the most comforting fragment in the Bible. May I tell you which I do? “Faithful is the saying... that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief” (1 Tim. 1:15). It is brought right down to the personal. Yes, there are many comforting things in the Bible, but you cannot get deeper than that, you cannot get behind that. All this infinite passion and travail for such as we! The Bible says it! I said that I would simply make statements, without attempting to define or explain.

That is one reason why we find such difficulty in believing and accepting. The other probably is the mystery of God’s ways with us. So often, in the mystery of His ways, we are sorely tempted to wonder whether anything like this can be true. It may be true, we feel, of some people, but His ways with us do not seem to bear it out at all. A love like this? unto death? An estimate or valuation of a soul to this degree? Is that really borne out by these strange, mysterious dealings of God with us? — by these darknesses, these perplexities, these problems, these disappointments? Satan is always at our elbow to say, “That is not His love for you!”

I am not attempting to argue that out philosophically, or even from the Scripture; I am simply making the statement: *The Bible says ...* Here it is! What is all this — this about the travail of His soul? What is it for? *His seed*. Who are His seed? *Those who have believed on Him unto eternal life*. No more than that, no less than that. And they become enwrapped in this unspeakable thing — His soul’s travail. Oh, that we could believe it, at all times! — that you and I could believe that, behind all the mystery of His ways, the strangeness of His dealings, the bewilderment and perplexity as to what it is that He is after, there lies such a love as this!

That is the second thing — and, again, it is only a statement. But, oh! the infinite suffering behind our belonging to the Lord, the infinite suffering behind a soul’s salvation — a soul that might be yours or mine. What suffering! Peter draws this contrast: “Ye were redeemed, not with corruptible things, with silver or gold ... but” — here is the contrast — “with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot” (1 Pet. 1:18,19). As you know, the word “blood” is a simile for “soul”. In biblical symbolism, the soul is in the blood (Lev. 17:11, mg.). And so, when He poured out His blood, He “poured out his soul unto death” (Is. 53:12). His soul is set forth by Peter as something that is infinitely, transcendently more precious than gold or silver; and He has given that for our redemption! Behind your belonging to the Lord and my belonging to the Lord there lies that whole travail.

In saying this, I am trying to redeem this whole thing from cheapness. We have made our salvation too cheap and too easy; we have pulled it down to such a low level. We need to ponder the infinite cost and suffering which lies behind the salvation of one soul.

Christ's infinite love for His own

Further, there is the infinite love which Christ has for His own when He has got them. Paul seems to make some tremendous statements. Sometimes they almost sound like exaggeration. "Who shall separate us from ... the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus ...?" he asks (Rom. 8:35,39). He catalogues every conceivable thing that might be thought to be capable of doing that, and then, lumping them all together, he says: "Nay, I am persuaded that *none* of these things": in them all and over them all the love will triumph. The love that He has for those who are His own, when He has got them, is a tremendous thing, is it not? Sometimes we are prepared to believe, or inclined to think and accept, that the Gospel of our salvation is based upon all this in order to get us; but then, as we go on a bit further, we may sometimes feel tempted to wonder whether He still loves us as much now as He did at the beginning, whether He is still as concerned to have us now as He was then. I trust that that statement will not be misunderstood.

There is a wonderful picture of this in the Old Testament, in that temple that Solomon built — perhaps the most magnificent structure that had ever been built up to his time. The predominant feature of that temple was gold: everything was overlaid with gold: there was pure gold everywhere — gold, gold, over everything. It symbolizes the obtaining by the Lord, at last, of something that He had set His heart upon. At last the Lord has got that toward which He has been all the time working with His people: a place in which He can dwell. Now gold is always a figure of the divine love; and so everywhere His dwelling-place is simply covered and smothered with gold. He has got what He wanted, and it is to Him exceedingly precious; and so He writes that preciousness everywhere, lavishly. Oh, the lavishness of that gold in the days of Solomon! It is just a picture of God's love for and in something long desired, when He has come into possession of it. No, His love does not change after He has come into possession. It is still the same.

The infinite importance to Him of the church

So we are led to the next thing: the infinite importance attached by the Lord to His church. The word "church" is only another title for that which is elsewhere referred to as His temple, His wife, His bride. They are all in reality the same thing, and they all emphasize the infinite importance of the church in the eyes of the Lord. There are many people, I fear, who think that "church" is "teaching". It is what they call "church teaching". There is nothing that makes me shudder more than to hear people use that phrase, "church teaching"! I have even heard people speak about "the church teaching of Honor Oak" — "church teaching"! The Lord pity us, the Lord save us! The church is not a truth, it is not a teaching, it is not an idea. The church is a Gethsemane — the church is a bloody sweat. The church is a Golgotha — the church is the cry of a broken heart from the Cross, the pouring out of His soul unto death. The church is the great sob of God in this universe.

I am not exaggerating; that is not just words. I could take you to the prophets, and show you from them that all that is true. Oh, go back to some of those prophets and hear them! Do you not hear the sob of God as they speak? “O Ephraim ... O Judah ... How shall I give thee up, Ephraim?” (Hos. 6:4, 11:8). God is broken-hearted, just broken-hearted; and that broken heart is reflected in the words of the prophets, as they cry and weep over the Lord’s people, as an unfaithful bride, a wayward daughter, a prodigal son, a family repudiating the best of fathers. Do not talk about “church truth”, “church teaching” — oh, no, “Christ loved the church, and gave himself for it”. “I am jealous for Zion” — that is only a title for the church — “with great jealousy ... with great wrath”.

He loved the church — there is an infinite importance to Him in His church. Again I say, I cannot explain it; but there is the truth. Oh, that you and I might see *through* the truth and the doctrine and the teaching, to the *reality*, might see that *this* is the thing involved in that ruptured heart, in that agonized cry, in that sweating as it were great drops of blood. It is the church that is involved. That is not a “thing”, not a “theory”, not a “line of truth”. It is something tremendous.

The infinite motive for our response

What, then, does it lead to? Surely it leads, finally, to the infinite motive for our response to the Lord. To a first response, yes, for any who have never yet responded to Him: there is an infinite motive for your responding to Him — no less a motive than all this that we have seen. But then, there is the infinite motive for our own response — His own people’s response to Him on all matters. Why should I settle any controversy with the Lord, why should I set aside my own personal interests, why should I do this and that? Why ...? In the light of all this, *why not?! Is there anything that can really be set against this?* For going on with the Lord, for responding, being obedient, giving Him everything, we have an infinite motive.

And this is the infinite motive for service. Why should we give Him our life in service? Just for this reason. In the first days of the Moravian Brethren, when everything was so pure, so true, the Lord used them marvellously all over this world. It was a wonderful thing that happened. At the Edinburgh Conference in 1910, John R. Mott said that, if the whole Christian church had proceeded on the lines of the Moravian Brethren, the entire world would have been evangelized long ago. They had one missionary for every ten members of their fellowship. Yes, it was a wonderful story of sacrifice, of suffering, of giving themselves. What was the secret? They had a motto, which was written on everything and which they took with them wherever they went. It was this: “To win for the Lamb that was slain the reward of His suffering.” That is the infinite motive — the reward of His suffering for the Lamb that was slain.

I make the statement — that is all. It is something that is altogether beyond us; but this is what is here. That is the heart of Isaiah 53, and of all these other Scriptures. If this is true, He is not going to give us up easily; He is not going to abandon and forsake His purpose. He is going to return to it again and again. He will say: “I am returned unto Zion” (Zech. 8:3); He will come back again and

again for what He has set His heart upon. But oh, may we have something of this same love of God shed abroad in our own hearts by the Holy Spirit.

THE MEANING AND PLACE OF PRAYER

Prayer has an inner significance as well as an outward expression, and this is what is indicated by the words of our title. To consider the *meaning* of prayer is to consider its inner significance; to consider the *place* of prayer is to dwell more particularly upon the outward expressions of prayer in the Christian life and in the life of the church. All the varied expressions of true prayer take their rise from the inner secrets of the life of prayer, which will be our chief concern at this time.

In approaching such a matter as prayer, we are conscious of several things. In the first place, we are surely conscious of an acute sense of *need*. So often we find prayer the most difficult thing in the world. Somehow we find it much easier to engage in any form of Christian activity than to pray. Prayer is so spiritual, so largely hidden; we feel out of our depth — which, of course, we are!

Then we must be growingly aware of the immense *privilege* of prayer. What a privilege that such as we should be able to have audience with the God of heaven, that we should be able to draw near to God, through His Son, and call Him “Father”! Alas, that so often we take it all for granted. But at the heart of effective prayer there must lie a real sense of privilege.

Again, surely we all feel something of the *importance* of prayer. However small our experience, we just know that contact with heaven is of vital importance, that prayer must be the most effectual work to which we can give ourselves. We are conscious that, in such a day as this, vital, intelligent fellowship with God by prayer is the first need of the church, and of the greatest importance to the Lord.

Lastly, as we approach this matter, we must all be aware of a peculiar *hostility* to prayer: that there is an enemy, one of whose chief objectives is to throttle the prayer-life of the church. But after all, Satan’s bitter hostility to prayer only serves to underline its far-reaching importance, and we should be encouraged by his antagonism to lay hold of our immense resources in Christ, for the life of prayer is fully provided for in Him.

One further thing we must say, by way of introduction, and by way of indicating the important place that prayer occupies in the Christian life. *Prayer is the pulse of the spiritual life, infallibly revealing the true state of our hearts and the true state of the churches.* A Christian’s true spiritual condition and stature is mirrored by his prayer-life. Where the life of prayer is clear and strong and growing, the whole man is girded for action, the whole life is moving on with the Lord. But where the prayer-life is weak or neglected, or where the enemy has disturbed our life with the Lord, the whole life is undermined and out of action.

What is true of the individual is true of the churches. The spiritual state of a church is not revealed by the crowds who come to special meetings, but by the

strength and quality of the routine prayer-meetings. *Prayer is a most revealing thing.*

For our present purpose we must put from us any thought of a detailed consideration of what is disclosed in God's Word regarding prayer; the scope of the subject is too vast. It may perhaps help us to some appreciation of the greatness of this matter if we suggest certain possible lines for detailed meditation.

1. The recorded prayers of the Old Testament saints. What a range is here!
2. The Spirit of prayer moving in the church in New Testament times.
3. "The distilled essence of prayer", given by the Lord Jesus to His disciples and generally spoken of as "The Lord's Prayer."
4. The Lord Jesus as "The Man of Prayer".
5. The profound mysteries of the Lord's great prayer in the seventeenth chapter of John's Gospel.

For the present, however, we will be content with directing our attention more particularly to certain foundations of the life of prayer; and our method, for the sake of simplicity, will be that of "Question and Answer".

Q. *If God is ruling this universe as sovereign Lord, in love and wisdom, according to His will as expressed in unchanging laws, what is the use of prayer?*

A. *Prayer is one of the superior laws of the universe.*

The question is an old one, the stock-in-trade of the sceptic. At first sight it does seem absurd that human prayer should affect the divine will and apparently change the unalterable laws of the universe. To the sceptical mind it is ridiculous, nay, impossible, that the sun should stand still in answer to the prayer of Joshua (Joshua 10:12-14); but the truth is that *there are laws operating in the universe unknown to and unsuspected by men. There are superior laws which, when brought into action, transcend other laws without violating them. Prayer is one of God's superior laws. Through prayer these greater laws may be brought into action.* These facts may be seen both in the natural and in the spiritual realms. Every time an aeroplane flies, the law of gravity is transcended by the laws that govern flight, but the law of gravity is not thereby violated. And every true Christian knows that the Christian life is a far greater miracle than that of flight, for in his very being the law of sin and death is being overcome by the superior law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus (Rom. 8:2).

Prayer, then, is a law. God has willed, God has chosen, to work not in sheer sovereignty on His own but in fellowship with men, in the following out of His purpose. Enough is revealed in the Bible for us to say without hesitation that, in the accomplishing of His purpose, God has never acted without the cooperation of men of prayer. This is most clearly seen at every crisis, at every turning-point in spiritual history. To take but one of many examples: when the purpose of God for His people focused upon their extrication from Babylon at the

end of the captivity, the Lord had in Daniel, and doubtless others with him, the fellowship that He wanted. The story reveals that the great issue of the return to Jerusalem was the answer to prayer. As Daniel prayed, the powers of heaven were set in motion, and the powers of hell stirred to antagonism. The power and the purpose of God were released through the prayer of a man — a man in tune with the heart of God, a man who knew what God wanted to do and acted accordingly (Dan. 9, 10).

What a great thing is prayer in the will of God! There is no limit to what prayer can do within that will. True prayer is the most fruitful work in the world. When we consider that the very purpose of God may wait upon the prayer fellowship of at least some of His people, surely we must be moved to yield ourselves more thoroughly to such a privilege and responsibility in the critical day in which we live.

Q. *Is there an inner secret, a master-key, to prayer?*

A. *The heart of prayer is communion with God.*

Just as the inner secret of the Christian life is “union with Christ”, so the inner secret of prayer is “communion with Christ”. A Christian’s communion is founded upon his union. Prayer is a very close relationship expressing itself. The point that we must see is our *nearness* to God in Christ. What a word that is that says “he that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit” (1 Cor. 6:17). What a close relationship is implied in those passages that speak of our communion with the Father and with His Son and with the Holy Spirit (1 John 1:3; 2 Cor. 13:14).

Many people who are not Christians pray, especially in times of need, and God may answer them; but such cannot have communion with God, for they have no union with Him. We must appreciate this fundamental distinction between the Christian and the non-Christian. Through the Lord Jesus every true Christian is united to God in heaven by a life-link. We are not praying down here on the earth to One who is a long way off in heaven. We are one with Him there and He is one with us here! The devil is all the time trying to create a sense of distance between us and the Lord; but there is no distance between if we abide in Christ, for no one can be closer to the Father than the Son, and we are in Him!

But about this we must be quite clear: that prayer is essentially spiritual. It is essentially the communion of the human spirit with God who is Spirit. By new birth the human spirit is united to and quickened by the divine Spirit, and true prayer springs from this union. Very much prayer is unanswered because it does not take its rise from such communion. If we pray “in the flesh”, according to our own ideas, desires, impulses or will, we are setting aside the true meaning and purpose of prayer. But if we abide in Christ, we shall pray in the Spirit, and the answers will always be sure, for He has said: “If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatsoever ye will, and it shall be done unto you” (John 15:7).

If we have a firm grasp of this master-key of *communion*, we shall avoid many pitfalls. Let us consider two such for a moment. In Matthew 6:7,8, the Lord Jesus exposed that pitfall of “much speaking” which of course betrays a completely wrong conception of prayer, but a conception which is prevalent in the church today. It is often thought that if only we pray long enough and hard

enough, perhaps all through the night, the Lord is bound to answer. Alas! such prayer can often be a substitute for the reality of communion. *Prayer is not a means of getting God to do what He does not want to do; prayer provides Him with a way to work His own will.* When the Lord Jesus “continued all night in prayer”, He did not decide in advance, as it were, to have a “night of prayer”, but He was *drawn out* in prayer through the night, which is quite another matter. Self-effort in prayer is one thing: the constraint of the Spirit is another. One word uttered in communion with the heart of God will effect more than many of “our” best prayers. The primary thing is quality — the quality of vital communion with the Father.

Then, there is the pitfall of “organized prayer” which is so often an effort to get the Lord interested in “our” work for Him. The importance of prayer is recognised by all Christians, and so no Christian enterprise is now complete without organizing the appropriate prayer-backing to see it through. The question as to whether the enterprise was born out of deep heart fellowship with the Lord, as to whether it really is the work of God, has now become secondary. Until we see that the Lord does not want to be interested in “our” best efforts for Him, but wants to get us interested in what is truly His work, we shall waste a great deal of time in such prayer and fruitless activity.

Surely we can see that it is the Lord Himself who is the great Architect, Designer and Builder of all things; He is the great Worker, with His whole work spread out before Him; He alone can know how the work is to be done. Our concern must be to be in vital touch with Him, so that we may be with Him in what He is doing and not building castles in the air on our own.

The first practical step to communion with the Lord is to be quiet, and to “cease from ourselves”. The noise, rush and hurry of our fevered natures have no place in the calm of His presence. David says: “My soul is silent unto God” (Ps. 62:1, marg.). We must learn to get quiet with the Lord, and to retire from the fret of our souls. We must lay aside all our presumed knowledge of His will, and be willing to be shown otherwise. Thus, as we become centred on Him and realise the majesty of Him to whom we belong and to whom we have come, we shall find ourselves in an attitude of worship — for how can we draw near to HIM without worshipping? Then, and then only, will the way be clear for an effectual ministry of prayer.

Q. *Has God made any provision for such a high and holy relationship and service?*

A. *A full provision in His Son and by His Spirit.*

Well might we shrink back from such a privilege and responsibility if the Lord had not provided for every need and disqualification of ours, and given us every encouragement to draw near to Him, and to live near to Him! It will help us to sum up this provision in two words, CONFIDENCE and HELP.

Confidence

What a lot there is in the Word about “confidence”, about “boldness”, about “full assurance”! A spirit of confidence is essential to prayer and indeed to the whole Christian life. If we are uncertain and unsettled in our relationship to the Lord our whole life is undermined. Let us remind ourselves then of some of the Scriptures that inspire confidence.

“Having therefore ... BOLDNESS to enter into the holy place BY THE BLOOD OF JESUS, BY ... A NEW AND LIVING WAY ... AND HAVING A GREAT PRIEST ... let us draw near with a true heart in FULL ASSURANCE of faith” (Heb. 10:19-22, mg.).

“...our Lord Jesus Christ; through whom also we have had our access by faith into THIS GRACE WHEREIN WE STAND” (Rom. 5:1,2).

“...THROUGH HIM WE ... HAVE OUR ACCESS IN ONE SPIRIT UNTO THE FATHER” (Eph. 2:18).

“...Christ Jesus our Lord: in whom we have BOLDNESS AND ACCESS IN CONFIDENCE through our faith in him” (Eph. 3:11,12).

True confidence is based upon the knowledge that through Christ we have an undisputed right of entry into the very presence of God, that He has perfectly provided for such access, and that He Himself is our right of entry so that we may ever draw nigh to the Father in His Name. We are not called upon to present our own names (how fatal that would be!), but are always able to come in His Name — to hand in His Name, as it were.

The word “access” is a beautiful word, a word used for “a presentation to a royal presence”. Christ has not only provided for the possibility of our return to the Father’s house — He has introduced us, He has presented us to the Father as those redeemed with His own blood and as those alive from the dead with Him! We have not to go into the palace on our own, in all our conscious unfitness, but we have One who takes us by the hand and leads us in, clothed with the robes of His own righteousness. It is Christ Himself who is our confidence.

Help

Blessed as it is to have such an “access in confidence”, well do we know our helplessness in the face of such a privilege. Somehow we feel so weak and ignorant that we should be dumb but for the Spirit’s help. *But we have such a Helper*, for it is written: —

“...the Spirit ... helpeth our infirmity: for we know not how to pray as we ought; but the Spirit himself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered; and he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God” (Rom. 8:26,27).

In nothing is our weakness so apparent as in the matter of prayer! The complete paralysis of man by nature in regard to the things of God is never more clearly seen than when man tries to pray. How well we understand the difficulty of the disciples in Gethsemane, when they just could not “watch and pray”. But the mighty Spirit of God is our Helper. We must rely on Him as the Indwelling Spirit, “the power that worketh in us”, for He is the answer to our weakness. And He is the answer to our ignorance too, for it is very true that “we know not how to pray”. The Holy Spirit is in us as the One who knows the will of God and all the details that lie within that will, and He will surely teach us how to pray in intelligent fellowship with the Father: He will make communion a reality.

Let us then cleave to Christ our Confidence and the Holy Spirit our Helper.

Q. *Why is there such a conspiracy against prayer?*

A. *Because Satan is determined to cut our lines of communication with heaven, and to prevent true prayer at all costs.*

We need to be alive to the fact that a relentless and continuous assault is being made upon the prayer-life of every Christian and of the church. Satan knows that, if he wins the battle for prayer, there will be little else to worry about. We must WATCH, we must be alert, we must be on our guard, if we are going to pray.

This continuous assault of the enemy has some fairly well-defined aspects.

(i) There is the assault upon our confidence. If Satan can overwhelm us with a sense of our unworthiness and helplessness, he knows that we shall have no heart for prayer. We have already considered the answer to this.

(ii) There is the assault upon mind and body, upon our nervous and physical resources. We can be too tired, too exhausted to pray, and if he can the enemy will see to it that we are so. We must watch against an over-tiredness which is our own fault! For the rest we may count on the Lord.

(iii) There is the assault against specific times of prayer, both in our personal lives and in our life together. We all have experience of the deep-laid plot, either to rob us altogether of our times of prayer, or in some way to neutralise them, to rob them of vitality.

(iv) There is the assault upon communion, upon our moment by moment life with the Lord, and the insidious attempt to get us “out of touch”. Well we know that the enemy has many ways of bringing a cloud into our relationship with the Lord, of bringing something between. “Ambushed lies the evil one” is not just a line in a hymn!

(v) And, finally, there is the determination of the enemy to keep us in the dark and out of the situations that really need prayer. Ceaselessly he strives to keep us occupied with our own affairs, so that our prayer-life is crippled and petty. We must not play into his hands through failing to gather fuel for prayer by looking out with the Lord upon His interests throughout the whole world. “The field is the world”, and prayer recognises no smaller boundary as its responsibility. Let us then —

“Watch and Pray.”

Q. *What is the Lord's answer to the limitations of personal prayer?*

A. *Praying together — the prayer of the church.*

We are taking nothing from the value or importance of personal prayer when we recognise that in the will of God it has limitations. It is a law of the Kingdom of God that we cannot do without one another. In the very nature of things we need one another in Christ, and never more so than in prayer. Every Christian who is going on with the Lord finds it imperative to have fellowship in prayer, from time to time, over needs and situations which demand something more than individual prayer; and when it comes to the great matters of the Kingdom, only the combined resources of the church are adequate. Perhaps we need to ponder afresh the significance of what the Lord said:

"My house shall be called a house of prayer" (Matt. 21:13) (to which we may add from Hebrews 3:6: "whose house are we");

and again:

"IF TWO OF YOU shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father who is in heaven. FOR WHERE TWO OR THREE ARE GATHERED TOGETHER IN MY NAME, THERE AM I IN THE MIDST OF THEM" (Matt. 18:19,20).

The fact is that there must always be more of the Lord in our life together in Him than ever there can be in the experience of any one of us individually. There is something extra of the Lord in our gathering together in Him and unto Him. He is in the midst of the church; He cannot be in the "midst" of one! When we are really together with the Lord, we sense that we have come into a larger world of possibility in prayer, we sense an added strength for the battle, and this is what the Lord intends. And not only so, but it is so often in our prayer-life together that the Holy Spirit reveals His mind and burden, giving utterance to prayer which is truly the will of God. Much more might be said about this most important matter, but we must be content to leave it there, with just this final word, that the prayer of the church is no substitute for personal prayer, which will ever lie behind and govern our prayer-life together.

Q. *What aspects of prayer are opened up by the master-key of communion?*

A. *Some of the varied aspects of the ministry of prayer are the following:*

(i) *Sharing* our whole lives with the Lord is an obvious first aspect of prayer. We may and we must bring all the details of daily life to the Lord, for there is nothing ordinary or insignificant in the life of a Christian. Communion with the Lord about everything should be a spontaneous habit with us. (Phil. 4:6).

(ii) *Ask! Ask!* The Lord loves to be asked, for He is a bountiful giver! And He loves to be thanked too! "If any of you lacketh ... let him ask of God, who giveth to all liberally and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. But let him ask in faith, nothing doubting." "Ye have not, because ye ask not. Ye ask, and

receive not, because ye ask amiss.” (Jas. 1:5,6; 4:2,3.) Asking implies dependence and desire, and these are very good things, when our motives are pure.

(iii) *Mediation, Intercession*: by which we mean our standing before the Lord for others, which is really fellowship with our great High Priest in His unceasing intercession for His people and their needs. (Col. 4:12).

(iv) *Prevailing Prayer*: perseverance in prayer; the prayer of importunity. Here, we must first rid ourselves of the idea of a reluctant God. Prevailing in prayer is simply holding on for what you know the Lord wants. But why does the Lord require such long-drawn-out, long unanswered prayer? There are at least two reasons:

(a) He requires an adequate response in us to His own deep desire and concern, and

(b) There are needs and situations which will only yield to such prayer. There are spiritual strongholds which require more than one or two assaults. (Matt. 7:7,8; Mark 9:28,29).

(v) *Governing Prayer*: prayer in fellowship with Him who is “far above all”, as one with Him in His throne; prayer in the authority of “the Name which is above every name”. (Eph. 2:6).

(vi) *Militant Prayer*: prayer that brings the victory of the cross to bear upon situations; prayer that moves in the train of His triumph. (Acts 4:23-31).

(vii) *The Prayer of Faith*, which, springing out of a Spirit-given certainty as to the will of God in a situation, issues in an immediate answer. (Acts 9:40).

(viii) *The Burden of Prayer*: prayer that is travail, an entering into “the fellowship of His sufferings”; prayer in fellowship with the Father’s heart, and in harmony with the yearnings of the Spirit unto the appointed Day of Glory! (Gal. 4:19).

And this leads us on to a final question —

Q. *What does the Bible reveal as the central issue of prayer?*

A. *A glorious church!*

The securing of a glorious church for Christ, a church worthy of Him, must be the central issue of prayer, for the whole Bible reveals it to be central to the heart and purpose of God. We must surely take particular note of such a disclosure of the Lord’s heart as is given in His great prayer before the Cross (John 17), and also note the prayers of Paul for the saints as revealed in his letters. This will take nothing from the scope and range of our praying, but it will give to all prayer a central issue and a single goal, and enhance the significance of each contribution by placing it in its true setting. We shall not pray less, but more, over this lost world, if we see that salvation goes far beyond the saving of a soul from death, into the limitless wonders of union with Christ in glory. And further, what greater need is there today than that the world should see something of the glories of Christ through the church? The church, in the hands of the Holy Spirit, should

be the means of bringing challenge and conviction as well as blessing to the world.

In conclusion, the Lord is surely saying that He is wanting us all in an intelligent, ever-deepening fellowship with Himself. This is the meaning of prayer. He is wanting many sons in His presence in union with His one beloved Son, our Lord Jesus; He is wanting many priests before Him in company with that great high Priest who ever lives to make intercession for us.

“HE MADE US A KINGDOM, PRIESTS UNTO HIS GOD AND FATHER” (Rev. 1:6).

“A ROYAL PRIESTHOOD” (1 Pet. 2:9).