

Chapel Flock



~ Thought For The Day ~

~gathering from the 4 winds~

"come just as you are"

Refresh, Restore, Rebuild = Healing

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Worship Music

[I Surrender-Hillsong](#)

[Healer-Kari Jobe](#)

[Angel By Your Side-
Francesca Battistelli](#)

Prayer

Lord, I ask You to help me become faithful and dependable. I want to be the kind of person others can rely on. I ask You to forgive me for those times when I got so lazy and complacent that I didn't follow through on commitments and, in the end, let other people down. I thank You for the gifts and talents You have placed in my life, but please help me bring my character to such a high level that You and others will know I can be trusted. I pray that I always practice and live in integrity, in Jesus' name. Amen.....

Sparkling Gems from the Greek.

Video's / New Information/ Prayer Requests

Matthew 24:36 (AMP)

36 But of that [exact] day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.

["Miracles Through You"](#)

Bob Coy

Chapel Flock.....text a prayer..... request telephone number.....

(316) 247-3623

Or----

If you have a prayer request...please e-mail it to us so we can pray for you...or a person.....

chapel-flock@sbcglobal.net

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Cathe Laurie](#)

Psalm 23:1-6 (AMP)

1 THE LORD is my Shepherd [to feed, guide, and shield me], I shall not lack.

2 He makes me lie down in [fresh, tender] green pastures; He leads me beside the still and restful waters.

3 He refreshes and restores my life (my self); He leads me in the paths of righteousness [uprightness and right standing with Him—not for my earning it, but] for His name's sake.

4 Yes, though I walk through the [deep, sunless] valley of the shadow of death, I will fear or dread no evil, for You are with me; Your rod [to protect] and Your staff [to guide], they comfort me.

5 You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my [brimming] cup runs over.

6 Surely or only goodness, mercy, and unfailing love shall follow me all the days of my life, and through the length of my days the house of the Lord [and His presence] shall be my dwelling place.

 Psalm 23

Psalm 23, the prayer of David, or a psalm of David, rather. And it is a psalm in which he sees God in three aspects. He sees God first as a shepherd; secondly as a guide; and thirdly as a host. There is a very interesting commentary called, "A Shepherd Looks at the Twenty-third Psalm." And you might want to read this book. It is a fascinating book, as it goes into many of the aspects of a shepherd, and the character and the nature of sheep. And you'll find it an excellent commentary on the twenty-third psalm, "A Shepherd Looks at the Twenty-third Psalm." But in reality, a guide could look at it too, and a host could look at it, because he sees God in all three capacities, not just as a shepherd, but also as a guide and as a host. God is a shepherd.

Jehovah is my shepherd; I shall not want (Psa 23:1).

I shall not want, actually, for provision.

For he makes me to lay down in green pastures (Psa 23:2):

I shall not want for refreshment, for

he leads me beside the still waters (Psa 23:2).

I shall not want for strength, for

He restoreth my soul (Psa 23:3):

So God is a shepherd. Watching over me, leading me into green pastures, leading me to the still waters, restoring my soul.

But now God is a guide.

he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness [or in the right path] for his name's sake. And yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me (Psa 23:3-4);

Now, God is leading me through my path of life. He leadeth me. "In all thy ways acknowledge Him, He will direct your path" (Proverbs 3:6). God will lead you through your path of life. But each one of you the path of life will one day, barring the rapture of the church, lead into the valley of the shadow of death. When it does, I will fear no evil, for Thou art with me. Death doesn't hold any terror or fear for the child of God.

A survey was recently done among morticians; 2000 of them responded to it. And it was a survey that dealt with the preparation of bodies of those people who they knew to be truly born again and those who were not. And you can ask a mortician, and it's almost impossible for a mortician to put a smile on a person's face when they are dead. Did you know that? Next to impossible, unless the person was a born again Christian. And they had observed this phenomena, and so they made sort of a survey among morticians, and it all came back, yes, they had all observed the same phenomena. You bet there will be a smile on my face! All right, you know.

"For death has been swallowed up in victory. O death where is thy sting? O grave where is thy victory? For the sting of death was sin, but sin has been removed. Thanks be unto God, who gives us the victory through Jesus Christ our Lord" (I Corinthians 15:55-57). So, even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for Thou art with me. Oh, the presence of God. Taking me by the hand, leading me through the valley.

Now God is seen as a host.

Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over (Psa 23:5).

God is just really a great host. He is a gracious host. He takes care of you fabulously. Preparing a table before you, anointing your head with oil, causing your cup to overflow. The glorious overflowing life of the child of God. "If any man thirsts," Jesus cried, "let him come to Me and drink. And he who drinks of the water that I give, out of his innermost being, there will gush torrents of living water" (John 7:37-38). The cup will overflow.

Surely goodness and mercy should follow me all the days of my life (Psa 23:6):

Wherever I go, throughout my pilgrim journey on this earth. Goodness and mercy. The goodness of God, the mercy of God, attending my path. And at the end of the path, all the days of my life having been completed,

I shall then dwell in the house of the LORD for ever (Psa 23:6).

That house that Jesus spake of, when He said, "In my Father's house there are many mansions. And I'm going to prepare a place for you." Now I look at this world and I love to go to Hawaii, and I love to go to Yosemite, and I love to go into any areas where you have beautiful woods and ferns and rivers, and streams and flowers and fauna. I love it! I love the beauty. And I look at the beauties of Grand Canyon. I look at the beauties of the oceans. I look at the beauties of the lakes and the rivers and the streams and the woods, the deserts. And I realize that He created the whole thing in six days. Now, it was about 1900 years ago that He said He was going to prepare a place for me. If He could do all of this in six days, what must that place be like that He has been working on for 1900 years? You bet there will be a smile on my face. As I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

(Through The Bible c 2000 Series; Chuck Smith; Bible commentaries,1979-1986)

Tongue of Fire (1858); by William Arthur; formatted for e-sword by David Cox (c) 2007

CHAPTER VI; PRACTICAL LESSONS.

AT one time we meant to dwell at considerable length upon practical lessons connected with our subject; but this book is already larger than we wished it to be, and we will therefore touch only three topics. We may learn a lesson on the source of power; one on the way to obtain power; and one on the scale on which our expectations of success should be framed.

In the application of any instrument, no error can be more fatal than one that affects the source of power. To recur to an illustration before used, any reasoning upon explosive weapons which assumed elasticity to be the source of power, must lead completely astray. If this is to be noted in all things, it is especially to be noted in what affects the regeneration of the world. In merely natural processes, persons proposing to affect the sentiments of mankind must depend largely on their influence, their wealth, and their facilities. Christians frequently permit themselves to fall into a state of mind in which the want of all or any of these is taken to be fatal to their prospects of success, and the acquisition of them to be the first step toward making any impression. But wealth, influence, and facilities, however great, never yet secured results in the spiritual conversion of men; while the most notable triumphs of Christianity have often been gained in the total absence of them all.

Others, or the same men at different times, would rather allow their hopes to rest on order, talent, or truth. But neither are these the source of power. Order is as necessary in Christianity as are bones, ligaments, and skin in a man; talent is as necessary as brain, and truth as blood. But you may have all these, and have a paralytic--aye, have them all, and have but a corpse. You must have both the breathing spirit and that indescribable something we call "power." Indeed, the order of the Christian Church ought to be such, her outward framework so constructed, that she shall not be as a building, which, though it looks more cheerful when there is life within, yet will stand when there is none; but rather as a body, which falls the moment the spirit forsakes it, and tends to decomposition. No Church ought to be otherwise constructed than in entire dependence on the presence of the living Spirit in all her ministerial arrangements. Her frame ought to answer to no definition that would suit an inorganic body; but to answer exactly to the celebrated definition of an organic one--namely, "that wherein every part is mutually means and end." The pervading presence of the Spirit should be assumed, so that, if it be absent, the pains of death shall instantly take hold upon her, and the cry be extorted, "Lord, save, or I perish!"

We must again recall to mind that most wonderful silence of ten days--that long, long pause of the commissioned Church in sight of the perishing world. Never should the solemnity of that silence pass from the thoughts of any of God's people. It stands in the very forefront of our history--the Lord's most memorable and affecting protest beforehand, that no authority under heaven, that no training, that no ordination could qualify men to propagate the gospel, without the baptism of the Holy Ghost. Each successive day of those solemn and silent ten, the perishing world might have knocked at the door of the Church, and asked, "What waitest thou for, O bride of the ascended Bridegroom? Why dost thou not say, 'Come'? Why leavest thou us to slumber on uncalled, unwarned, unblessed, whilst thou, with thy good tidings, art tarrying inactive there? What waitest thou for?" And every moment the answer would have been: "We are waiting to be 'indued with power from on high'; we are waiting to be 'baptized with the Holy Ghost and with fire.'"

This is the one and the only source of our power. Without this, our wealth, influence, facilities, are ships of war and ammunition without guns or men; our order, talent, truth, are men and guns, without fire. We want in this age, above all wants, fire, God's holy fire, burning in the hearts of men, stirring their brains, impelling their emotions, thrilling in their tongues, glowing in their countenances, vibrating in their actions, expanding their intellectual powers more than can ever be done by the heats of genius, of argument, or of party; and fusing all their knowledge, logic, and rhetoric into a burning stream. Every accessory, every instrument of usefulness, the Church has now in such a degree and of such excellence as was never known in any other age; and we want but a supreme and glorious baptism of fire to exhibit to the world such a spectacle as would raise ten thousand hallelujahs to the glory of our King.

Let but this baptism descend, and thousands of us who, up to this day, have been but commonplace or weak ministers, such as might easily pass from the memory of mankind, would then become mighty. Men would wonder at us, as if we had been made anew; and we should wonder, not at ourselves, but at the grace of God which could thus transform us.

Suppose we saw an army sitting down before a granite fort, and they told us that they intended to batter it down. We might ask them, "How?" They point to a cannon ball. Well, but there is no power in that; it is heavy, but not more than half a hundred, or perhaps a hundred weight. If all the men in the army hurled it against the fort, they would make no impression. They say: "No; but look at the cannon." Well, there is no power in that. A child may ride upon it, a bird may perch in its mouth; it is a machine, and nothing more. "But look at the powder." Well, there is no power in that; a child may spill it, a sparrow may peck it. Yet this powerless powder and powerless ball are put into the powerless cannon; one spark of fire enters it; and then, in the twinkling of an eye, that powder is a flash of lightning, and that ball a thunderbolt, which smites as if it had been sent from heaven. So is it with our Church machinery at this day: we have all the instruments necessary for pulling down strongholds, and oh for the baptism of fire!

As to the way in which this power may be obtained, here we have only to recall the lesson of the ten days--"They continued with one accord in prayer and supplication." Prayer earnest, prayer united, and prayer persevering--these are the conditions; and these being fulfilled, we shall assuredly be "indued with power from on high." We should never expect that the power will fall upon us just because we happen once to awake and ask for it; nor have any community of Christians a right to look for a great manifestation of the Spirit, if they are not all ready to join in supplication, and, "with one accord," to wait and pray as if it were the concern of each one. The murmurer, who always accounts for barrenness in the Church by the faults of others, may be assured that his readiest way to spiritual power, if that be his real object, lies in uniting all, as one heart, to pray without ceasing.

Above all, we are not to expect it without persevering prayer. Prayer which takes the fact that past prayers have not yet been answered, as a reason for languor, has already ceased to be the prayer of faith. To the latter, the fact that prayers remain unanswered is only evidence that the moment of the answer is so much nearer. From first to last, the lessons and example of our Lord all tell us that prayer which cannot persevere, and urge its plea importunately, and renew, and renew itself again, and gather strength from every past petition, is not the prayer that will prevail.

When John in the Apocalypse saw the Lamb on the throne, before that throne were the seven lamps of fire burning, "which are the seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the earth"; and it is only by waiting before that throne of grace that we become imbued with the holy fire; but he who waits there long and believingly will imbibe that fire, and come forth from his communion with God, bearing tokens of where he has been. For the individual believer, and, above all, for every laborer in the Lord's vineyard, the only way to gain spiritual power is by secret waiting at the throne of God for the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Every moment spent in real prayer is a moment spent in refreshing the fire of God within the soul. We said before that this fire cannot be simulated; nothing else will produce its effects. No more can the means of obtaining it be feigned. Nothing but the Lord's own appointed means, nothing but "waiting at the throne," nothing but keeping the heart under "the eyes of the Lamb" to be again and again and again penetrated by his Spirit, can put the soul into that condition in which it is a meet instrument to impart the light and power of God to other men.

When a lecturer on electricity wants to show an example of a human body surcharged with his fire, he places a person on a stool with glass legs. The glass serves to isolate him from the earth, because it will not conduct the fire--the electric fluid. Were it not for this, however much might be poured into his frame, it would be carried away by the earth; but, when thus isolated from it, he retains all that enters him. You see no fire, you hear no fire; but you are told that it is pouring into him. Presently you are challenged to the proof--asked to come near, and hold your hand close to his person; when you do so, a spark of fire shoots out toward you. If thou, then, wouldst have thy soul surcharged with the fire of God, so that those who come nigh to thee shall feel some mysterious influence proceeding from thee, thou must draw nigh to the source of that fire, to the throne of God and of the Lamb, and shut thyself out from the world--that cold world, which so swiftly steals our fire away. Enter into thy closet, and shut to thy door, and there, isolated, "before the throne," await the baptism: then the fire shall fill thee; and when thou comest forth, holy power will attend thee, and thou shalt labor, not in thine own strength, but "with demonstration of the Spirit and with power."

As this is the only way for an individual to obtain spiritual power, so is it the only way for Churches. Prayer, prayer, all prayer--mighty, importunate, repeated, united prayer; the rich and the poor, the learned and the unlearned, the fathers and the children, the pastors and the people, the gifted and the simple, all uniting to cry to God above, that he would come and affect them as in the days of the right hand of the Most High, and imbue them with the Spirit of Christ, and warm them, and kindle them, and make them as a flame of fire, and lay his right hand mightily on the sinners that surround them, and turn them in truth to him. Such united and repeated supplications will assuredly accomplish their end, and "the power of God" descending will make every such company as a band of giants refreshed with new wine.

If the source of our power, and the way to obtain it, be so plain, how can it be that the "tongue of fire" is so rare? What are the hindrances? Is it because, as many would seem to think, nothing is so difficult to obtain as the grace of the Holy Spirit? We often hear it said, All effort must be unsuccessful without the blessing of God, without the accompanying power of the Spirit; and the tone used indicates that it is therefore proper not to look for any great results, as if the accompanying power of the Spirit was the only thing not to be counted upon. The recognition of our impotency without the Spirit, and of the absolute necessity of his presence and his power, is as needful as the recognition of the fact that without sunshine and rain all labor and all skill would fail to preserve the human race for one season. But the sunshine and the rain are precisely the things which cost nothing, and on which we may constantly depend. So it is with the baptism and the power of the Holy Spirit. Freer than the air we breathe, freer than the rich sunbeams, freer than any of God's other gifts, because it is the one which has cost him most, and which blesses his children most, that gift is ever at hand; and when we have done what the Lord lays upon us to do, it is dishonoring to him to cherish a secret feeling as if he, being good, not evil, was backward to pour out his Spirit, and to do good to his children.

This feeling of unbelief, wherever cherished, must, on the principles of the gospel, be fatal to all power. He alone who magnifies the freeness, the fullness, and the present efficacy of the Lord's grace, can by the Holy Ghost accomplish wonders. Trust, firm trust, straightforward, childlike trust, is the everlasting condition of all cooperation with God. He will not use, he will not bless, he will not inhabit the heart that, at the moment when it offers him a request, says, "I doubt thee."

In this age of faith in the natural, and disinclination to the supernatural, we want especially to meet the whole world with this credo: "I believe in the Holy Ghost." I expect to see saints as lovely as any that are written of in the Scriptures--because I believe in the Holy Ghost. I expect to see preachers as powerful to set forth Christ evidently crucified before the eyes of men, as powerful to pierce the conscience, to persuade, to convince, to convert, as any that ever shook the multitudes of Jerusalem, or Corinth, or Rome because I believe in the Holy Ghost. I expect to see Churches, the members of which shall be severally indued with spiritual gifts, and every one moving in spiritual activity, animating and edifying one another, commending themselves to the conscience of the world by their good works, commending their Saviour to it by a heart-engaging testimony--because I believe in the Holy Ghost. I expect to see villages where all the respectable people are now opposed to religion, the proprietor ungodly, the nominal pastor worldly, all that take a lead set against living Christianity--to see such villages summoned, disturbed, divided, and then reunited, by the subduing of the whole population to Christ--because I believe in the Holy Ghost. I expect to see cities swept from end to end, their manners elevated, their commerce purified, their politics Christianized, their criminal population reformed, their poor made to feel that they dwell among brethren--righteousness in the streets, peace in the homes, an altar at every fireside--because I believe in the Holy Ghost. I expect the world to be overflowed with the knowledge of God; the day to come when no man shall need to say to his neighbor, "Know thou the Lord," but when all shall know him, "from the least unto the greatest"; east and west, north and south, uniting to praise the name of the one God and the one Mediator--because I believe in the Holy Ghost.

Unbelief and neglect of prayer generally go together as preventives of spiritual power. Let all of us who are painfully conscious that the results just indicated will never be attained by the instrumentality of men, in the condition in which we are, simply ask ourselves, How long, how often, how importunately have we waited at the throne of the Saviour for the outpouring of the Spirit? Let our closets answer. "The eyes of the Lamb," that are looking through us now, have noted. Oh, is it any wonder that oftentimes we have been powerless, and oftentimes have had but "a little strength"?

Want of true faith and neglect of prayer are sure to make place for faith in the instrument, instead of in the power. When we are not living near the throne, our minds become occupied with questions of order, of talent, or of truth; or, if we sink into yet a lower state, with questions of facility, or influence, or wealth. This Church reform will be followed by great good: the clear development of such or such a doctrine would bring us revival; more luster or strength of talents in the ministry would insure progress. We only wait the removal of such and such hindrances to open this door; for the supply of pecuniary means, and we shall see good done there; or for the accession to the Church of some person of influence, and God's work will prosper yonder. Faith is sadly wasted when bestowed on such things. Give them their right value, never underrate them, place them where God has placed them; but the fact that you trust in them shows that your heart is wrong. Wait not for these--for the power is not in them but for the baptism of fire.

Among the hindrances which will prevent any one from having the "tongue of fire," none acts more directly than any misuse of the "tongue" itself. If the door of the lips be not guarded, if uncharitable or idle speech be indulged, if political or party discussion be permitted to excite heats, if foolish "talking or jesting" be a chosen method of display, it is not to be supposed that the same tongue will be the medium wherein the sacred fire of the Spirit will delight to dwell. Who has ever worn at the same time the reputation of a trifler and of a man powerful to search consciences?

Another fatal hindrance is any kind of sensual indulgence. Whatever gives the least ascendancy to the body over the spirit, must gradually subdue and ultimately extinguish the fire in the heart. This applies to all sloth, to every luxurious habit, every artificial appetite, and all the pleasures of the table. It is not a little remarkable that while, at the day of Pentecost, the people, on seeing the excitement and animation of the Christians, said, "They are filled with new wine," Paul himself says to us, "Be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit." In both these cases there is a suggestion, however indirect, yet unquestionably a suggestion, of some analogy between the condition of being "drunk with wine" and that of being "filled with the Spirit."

Nor do we need to seek far for the grounds of that analogy. To men of the world wine is a resort when they want something above their natural strength of mind or body, and in it they seek three things--strength, cheering, and mental elevation. Under its influence they will do more work than they could otherwise; they will cast off their cares, and their mental powers will reach a state which they themselves call "inspiration." That worldly orators, even of the highest reputation, often seek in wine such animation of their powers as is necessary to great success, is only too well known. The physical tendency to seek elevation in such a source cannot be even slightly yielded to, without fatally affecting the "tongue of fire."

Every Christian, who wishes to retain the life of God in his soul, must hold all the enjoyments of the table under a strict law of regard to health and to temperance. For strength, for cheering, and for mental elevation, such as an extraordinary affliction or public effort may demand, he must look alone to power from on high--to the strength and comfort and inspiration of the Holy Ghost. The bare idea of seeking any of these in wine implies a heart already far fallen into the bondage of the flesh. Even without going so far, one may easily pass the bounds of moderation, and drink, not for health, but for pleasure. If the man who drinks to intoxication is miserable and pitiable, he who has learned the bad secret of "how far he can go," and who even acts upon it, although he may never be drunk, is daily intemperate. In one aspect, his social influence is the most dangerous of all; for while one who totally abstains, and one who drinks under a rigid rule of regard for health and moderation, may each contend that they are setting the wisest example that can be set, and while the drunkard may truly say that his very excess is a warning to all about him, he who habitually shows that he drinks as much as is safe is a lure and an enticement to push indulgence as far as it can be done without wreck of character.

Another fatal hindrance is what may be called "aiming at literary effect." When preaching, praying, or any other religious exercise of the tongue is ruled by the idea of composition, it loses the character of a Divine gift. Under that idea, utterance especially is by the aid of the Holy Spirit. With those who look at Christian preaching as an exercise of natural talent, we enter into no discussion. We speak only to those who are seeking the "tongue of fire"; who believe that real Christian preaching is effected only by the help of God. To them, and not to ourselves, we say that nothing will more surely steal away the fire from our sentences than anxiety to deliver them just as they were precomposed, or to precompose them with studious regard to literary grace. Study of style, of words, of the force, forms, and laws of language, we of course recommend. Efforts on the part of every one to gain the best style of which his nature admits--the tersest, strongest, clearest, briefest--we equally recommend. Seeking, like Bunyan, for "picked and packed words," is the instinct of a teacher. Even the study of the art of speaking, against which the vulgar prejudice is so strong, we would, with Wesley and Whitefield, encourage. Mouthing elocutionists may have brought it into disrepute, but that is no reason why hundreds of us should be maimed in health before mid-life by public speaking, when we might have done as much work, and done it better, without the least injury, had we availed ourselves of the science of those who have philosophically studied and taught upon the voice.

[It is often assumed that speaking is a natural exercise, and therefore needs no instruction. The word "speaking" covers a fallacy. Conversation in a moderate tone, and at short intervals, is a natural exercise of the voice; public speaking, in an elevated tone, and for an hour together, is an artificial one. Except in very rare cases of persons singularly favored by nature, this artificial exercise is never performed with the ease of the natural one; and how often it impairs and even destroys health is too notorious to need any mention. Such writers as Mr. Cull and Dr. Rush show that under proper training public speaking may become as easy and as healthy for persons of sound organs as singing is; and to the neglect of this we owe the loss, in their prime, of many of the best and ablest preachers that ever lived.]

While, however, we contend that it is the duty of all who take any part in teaching to labor to the uttermost for every qualification helpful to their work, two things are to be forever and guardedly shut out. The one is, aiming at giving intellectual pleasure, instead of producing religious impression; the other, being careful about words in the pulpit, so as to interfere with dependence upon God for utterance. In the study, attention to style ought to be with a view, not to beauty, but to power. In the pulpit, all thought of style is thought wasted, and even worse. The gift of prophesying in its very ideal excludes relying for utterance upon a manuscript or upon memory. It is the delivery of truth by the help of God. The feeling of every man standing up in the Lord's name ought to be: "I am not here to acquit myself well, nor to deliver a good discourse; but, after having made my best efforts to study and digest the truth, I am here to say just what God may enable me to say, to be enlarged or to be straitened, according as he may be pleased to give me utterance or not."

With this feeling of the preacher all appearances ought to correspond. It ought to be manifest that, while he has done what in him lies to be thoroughly furnished, he is trusting for utterance to help from above, and not insuring it by natural means--either a manuscript or memory. We put these two together, because we do not see that any distinction really exists between them. The plea that the manuscript is more honest than memoriter preaching has some force, but certainly not much; for he that reads from his memory is, to the feeling and instinct of his hearers, as much reading as he who reads from his manuscript. In neither case are the thoughts and feelings gushing straight from the mind, and clothing themselves as they come. The mind is taking up words from paper or from memory, and doing its best to animate them with feeling. Even intellectually, the operation is essentially different from speaking, and the difference is felt by all. For literary purposes, for intellectual gratification, both have a decided advantage over speaking; but for the purposes of pleading, entreating, winning, and creating a sense of fellowship, for impelling and arousing, for doing good, speaking is the natural, this is the Creator's, instrument.

We never say, nor think of saying, that God will not bless sermons read, either from the manuscript or from the memory; for we are sure that both these modes are resorted to by holy and earnest servants of his, who seek his blessing, and obtain it to the saving of many souls. All we say of reading, either from manuscript or the memory, is that it is not scriptural preaching. It is not ministering after the mode of pentecostal Christianity; it is a departure from scriptural precedent, an adoption of a lower order of public ministrations, and a solemn declaration that security of utterance gained by natural supports is preferred over a liability to be humiliated by trusting to the help of the Lord. It has its clear advantages, and its clear losses. It secures a gain of elegance, at the cost of ease; of finish, at the cost of freedom; of precision, at that of power; and of pleasure, at that of religious impressiveness. A literary ideal of preaching is vicious. Half-educated people pride themselves on admiring what they consider intellectual, or "splendid." To men of real mind and real education, aiming at literary effect is as distasteful, on the one hand, as are traces of earnestness, looseness, or vulgarity, on the other. Men of great talent or refinement, when speaking great truths, under holy inspiration, must be eloquent or pleasing; but an "intellectual treat" is far from being the ideal of preaching. We have heard efforts of this kind greatly praised, even by aged and venerable ministers, which, when we look back upon them, after years have elapsed, we feel ought not to have been called sermons at all. They were discourses which showed how a certain subject could be treated; but which were never meant to do any work. An acute and profound philosopher, looking upon the pulpit from the chair of the historical professor, treats this point in the following remarkable words: "Compare, I pray you, gentlemen, the sacred eloquence of the sixth century with modern pulpit eloquence, even in its most palmy days in the seventeenth century. I said just now, that in the seventh and eighth centuries the character of literature had been that it ceased to be a literature--that it had become in fact a power; that in writing and speaking men concerned themselves only with positive and immediate results; that they sought neither science nor intellectual pleasure; and that on this account the age had produced nothing but sermons or similar works. This fact, which shows itself in literature in general, is imprinted upon the sermons themselves. Those of modern times have a character evidently more literary than practical. The orator aspires much more after beauty of language, after the intellectual satisfaction of his auditory, than

to act upon the deeps of their souls, to produce real effects, notable reforms, efficacious conversions. Nothing of this sort--nothing of the literary character in the sermons of which I have just been speaking to you; not one thought of expressing themselves nicely, of combining images and ideas with art. The orator goes to the point; he wants to do a work; he turns and turns again in the same circle; he has no fear of repetition, of familiarity, not even of vulgarity. He speaks briefly, but recommences every morning. This is not sacred eloquence; it is religious power."

Whenever we are tempted to think that fruitfulness is only to be looked for in connection with superior attainments, the image of Peter preaching in Jerusalem, and of that vast multitude in tears before him, should rise into our view. With what reverence, not unmixed with sorrow, do we often look back on preachers of days now gone, perhaps on some whom our own ears have blessed when we heard them; but more on those of whose mighty voices we have caught faint echoes, sounding in the bosoms of hoary men who heard them in their youth, and have never ceased to hear them, though their tongues have long been silent! When noting our own poor efforts; when seeing how tamely the precepts of Sinai or the songs of Bethlehem have fallen upon men from our lips; seeing that, after our closest thinking, we have seemed as those who beat the air; that, after seeking converts, we have only gained credit; that, when looking for multitudes to be seized with the thought, "What must I do to be saved?" we have only sent them away to discuss our faults or our merits, with perchance here and there a heart touched and contrite;--when years have thus passed away, and no stronghold of sin brought down, no province completely conquered from the prince of darkness, no great awakening to show that there was a power and a God in the midst of the Church;--when we have seen all this, and much more alike thereto, has not our disposition often been to open a calculation as to our own abilities and difficulties before us, concluding, on the whole, that such as we need not expect to do things which only the mighty could do? How could lips like ours move mankind? True, apostles and prophets moved them. True, Whitefield and Wesley, and hundreds of their coadjutors, near to our days and in our own country, moved them. But then they were the wonders of their age, the seraphim of earth. But what made them seraphim? They were once no mightier than others as to converting souls. Unbaptized with fire, or but slightly touched, their tongues might have charmed, fascinated, set the world discussing their gifts and extolling their abilities; but they would never have shot fires into the souls of men, burned by which the stolid would roar, and the stoical melt, the sedate smite upon his breast, and the corrupt cleanse himself "from all filthiness of the flesh and of the spirit." Perhaps without the baptism of fire they would never have gained even the airy fame of orators. Their very eloquence may have come chiefly from the Spirit of God. At all events, it was that fire which raised the orator into the apostle, and made their words sound as if Christ's first messengers were risen from the dead.

The spectacle of Peter preaching at Jerusalem answers ten thousand arguments of unbelief. Who is that Galilean peasant, and who are that group beside him? They are men of like passions with ourselves. In nature, in gifts, in early opportunities, they cannot be ranked above the average of mankind. Even though they have been favored with the personal teaching and society of Christ for three whole years, they had not, up to this period, shown any extraordinary superiority of character. They have not been even without faults: they have had their disputes among themselves, their unbelief, their faint-heartedness, their strifes about the things of the world, their "false brethren"; yet are they indued with a power of speech which passes all previously conceived reach of eloquence.

Is it rational, when looking up to the Spirit which wrought this in them, to doubt whether or not it is within his power to baptize his servants now living with such a baptism as would change the ordinary into the extraordinary, the feeble into the mighty? Whether is it easier for Him to say, "Speak with many tongues," or to say, "I will give thee a mouth and wisdom which all thine adversaries shall not be able to gainsay or to resist"? The former He has said, and common men at once received the power; the latter He has said, and the same common men received the power. The former power we do not seek; but all of us who have any heart for our Master's service, any real intention to bear a part in the battle for the rescue of mankind, do desire in our very hearts--yea, long with mournful longing for a tongue of fire--to tell of the love of the Saviour, and of the woe of sin, in such tones that the dead ear shall tingle. Is he not able to give the gift now as he gave it then? Is the distrust of his power in this respect, which we find so common; this counting on our own impotence as a lifelong companion; this speaking of what we ought to expect, as if our power must halt where our natural abilities halt; this thinking it really humble to expect little or no fruit; this thinking it meek to be happy without fruit;--is all this a fit answer to the baptism and a fit memorial of the tongues of fire? Do we not there see the Spirit answering forever all doubts as to what ordinary men can be made, and proclaiming to all who bear a message from God, that if they will only wait until they are "indued with power from on high," the effect which of all others will show the working of that power within them will be this--that they shall be raised above themselves, and made to speak with a mouth and wisdom which all who know them will know were not within their natural endowments or attainments?

As to the scale on which our expectations should be framed. In our age, invention by aid of natural science often seems to leap almost within the bounds of the supernatural. The impossibilities of our fathers are disappearing, one becoming a traffic and another a pastime. This has produced a state of mind in which nothing seems impossible to natural science. Concurrently with this has arisen a tendency to bring spiritual progress and action within natural bounds. We are proud of our knowledge of the laws of the natural kingdom, and impatient of any phenomena which cannot be judged by them. Yet we do not object to judging the vegetable kingdom by laws totally different from those which we apply to the mineral, and the animal by laws totally different from what we apply to the vegetable, and the pervasive fluids by laws different from those we apply to any of those three kingdoms. To shrink from the marvels of vegetable life because they are unaccountable on chemical principles, or from those of instinct because they are unfathomable mysteries on botanical principles, or from those of intellect because they are inexplicable by the laws of natural history, or from the mysteries of light because they cannot be metaphysically analyzed and conditioned, would not be more unreasonable than to shrink from marvels in the spiritual kingdom, because they cannot be judged by the laws of the natural. The supernatural has its own laws, and there is a supernatural.

Instead of seeking to keep down spiritual movements to the level of natural explanation, in an age when natural marvels reach almost to miracles, we ought rather to be impelled to pray that they may put on a more striking character of supernatural manifestation. Today more by far is necessary to carry into the mind of the multitude a clear conviction, "It is the hand of God," than was necessary in other ages. When men saw few wonders from natural science, they readily ascribed each wonder to Divine agency; but now that they are

accustomed to see them daily, moral wonders must swell beyond all pretext of natural explanation, before they are felt to be from God. Is our footing firm? Do we stand, or do we tremble? Is Christianity to seat herself in the circle of natural agency, or to arise from the dust, and prove that there is a God in Israel? Are we to shrink from things extraordinary? Are we to be afraid of anything that would make skeptical or prayerless men mock? Are we to desire that the Spirit shall use and work in us just to such a degree as will never bring a sneer upon us--to pray, as a continental writer represents some as meaning, "Give us of the Holy Spirit; but not too much, lest the people should say that we are full of new wine"?

To Christianity this is preeminently the age of opportunity. Never before did the world offer to her anything like the same open field as at this moment. Even a single century from the present time, how much more limited was her access to the minds of men! Within our own favored country a zealous preacher would then have been driven away from many a sphere, where now he would be hailed. On the continent of Europe, the whole of France has been opened to the preaching of the word, though under some restraints. In Belgium, Sardinia, and other fields, it may now be said that the word of God is not bound. A century ago the Chinese Empire, the Mohammedan world, and Africa, containing between them such a preponderating majority of the human race, were all closed against the gospel of Christ. China is open at several points. The whole empire of the Mogul is one field where opportunity and protection invite the evangelist. Turkey itself has been added to the spheres wherein he may labor. Around the wild shores of Africa, and far into her western, eastern, and southern interior, outposts of Christianity have been established. Wide realms beyond invite her onward. In the South Seas, several regions which a hundred years ago had not been made known by the voyages of Cook, are now regularly occupied. Could the Churches of England and America send forth tomorrow a hundred thousand preachers of the gospel, each one of them might find a sphere, already opened by the strong hand of Providence, where a century ago none of them could have come without danger.

The age, if not so remarkable for agency as for opportunity, is yet very remarkable in this respect, when compared with any that has preceded it. While, on the one hand, we may well humble ourselves that, after so long a lapse of time, Christian men are so few, and Christian operations so feeble, yet, measuring our own day with that of the generation that went before us, we may devoutly magnify our God. Any one of the three great divisions of Christians in England--the Established Church, the Methodists, or the Dissenters--can this day furnish a number of faithful ministers teaching the truth in the fear of God, and wishful to be the instruments in saving souls, supported by a number of spiritually-minded laymen ready for every good work, such that, could they have been presented to John Wesley as the entire force of godly men in the country, would have made him feel as if the army for the whole world's conquest was already raised. Scotland alone could now produce a host of loyal soldiers ready and able to wage the Redeemer's war, such as in his day would have appeared to him almost sufficient to conclude the conquest. Ireland, too, would offer in this respect an amazing advance. In France, where, at the conclusion of the great Peace, scarcely any earnest preachers could be found, they may now be counted by hundreds; and in Germany, notwithstanding all its mists and its blights, not a few are growing up in vigor.

Whether for the direct labors of the pulpit, for united movements of enlightenment, or the ministering of gentle relief to the wants of human society, never, never did the sun shine upon so much agency, so much organization, so much liberty, so much earnest effort. Could we indulge ourselves by forming our own word, and only think of all the good men, good societies, and good works, on which the eye may rest, we might rejoice with unbroken joy, proclaim the full advent of the kingdom of God, and feel ourselves launched on a benign and brotherly age. But alas! alas! the vast world rolls on, a turbid and a freezing stream. When we look first at our own little land, then at the broad earth, we find, for one who fears God and works righteousness, there are thousands who forget God and work wickedness. Christian agency is not, therefore, as some amiable theorists would seem to think, chiefly for training those who are born Christians, or made Christians in baptism, and who need nothing more than Church ordinances, and an open heaven when they die. It is an agency raised up to carry out the great work of conversion which the Lord has begun within the lands of Christendom, and then bear onward the banner until every nation under heaven bows under it.

It is also an age of progress, as much as of opportunity or of agency. What an advance has Christianity made, as to the impress upon our national manners within the last century! On our highest classes and on our lowest, on those who love God and those who love him not, she has imposed many restraints. The vices which remain are every day made more hideous to the public eye. How different the amount of piety in officers and men developed by the horrors of the late war, from what was ever known in an English army before! How different the spiritual condition of many of our rural and manufacturing districts from what they were a century ago! What a change in the morals of the Court, in the temperance of private entertainments! How much more promising the aspect of Ireland! How much more animated the religion of Scotland! What an incalculable advance in America! And within that time the West Indies, Australia, New Zealand, the Society Islands, the Sandwich Islands, the Friendly Islands, the Navigator's Islands, a considerable part of Fiji, and tracts of Southern and Western Africa, may be written down as provinces added to Christendom. Though in some of these place much ungodliness remains, yet in most of them a far more promising state of things exists than was known in any country between the first days of Christianity and the last century.

In other countries, beginnings have been made and first fruits gathered; as, for instance, in India, China, and Northern Africa. At the same time, every system of religion not calling itself Christian has decayed. Mohammedanism, Brahmantam, Buddhism, and Paganism have lost territory, adherents, and power. Altogether it may be questioned whether even the progress of the first century has not been equaled, as to positive amount, by that of the last. But when we look at the agents, means, and facilities enjoyed during the last century compared with the first, and at the rapidity with which believers have multiplied themselves in both periods, we at once feel that, as to propagating power, in the face of adverse circumstances and small resources, there is no comparison between them. It is, on the one hand, as wrong and as dangerous to overlook the success which God has given to his word in the last age, or the unparalleled openings which promise to the Church future conquest, as it is, on the other, to repose on our present possessions, as if the conquest was achieved. What has been done is enough to excite our liveliest gratitude; but if we dwell on it alone, we become enervated and careless. What remains to be done is enough to excite our deepest solicitude; but if we look at it alone, we become dispirited and powerless. Even in England everything is stained: our commerce corrupt; our politics earthy; our social manners chiefly formed after the will of "the god of this world"; our streets crying shame upon us; our hamlets, many of them, dark, ignorant, and immoral; our towns debauched and drunken.

Amid this, much good exists, in which we do rejoice --yea, and will rejoice; but oh, the evil, the evil is, day by day, breaking thousands of hearts, ruining thousands of characters, and destroying thousands of souls! Looking abroad beyond the one little sphere of Britain and America, which we proud boasters of the two nations are prone to look upon as being nearly the whole world --though we are not one-twentieth of the human race, how dreary and how lonely does the soul of the Christian feel, as it floats in imagination over the rest of the earth! That Europe, so learned, so splendid, so brave--what misery is by its fireside! what stains upon its conscience! what superstition, stoicism, or despair around its deathbeds! And yonder bright old Asia, where the "tongue of fire" first spoke--how rare and how few are the scenes of moral beauty which there meet the eye! Instead of the family, the seraglio; instead of religion, superstition; instead of peace, oppression; instead of enterprise, war; instead of morals, ceremonies; instead of a God, idols; instead of refinement and growth, corruption and collapse; here, there, thinly sown and scarcely within sight one of the other, a school, a book, a man of God--one star in a sky of darkness. And poor Africa! what is to become of the present generation of her sons? Thinly around her coasts are beginnings of good things; but oh, the blood and darkness and woe, the base superstition and the miserable cruelties, under which the majority of her youth are now trained, amid which her old men are going down to the grave!

All this existed a century ago, but was not then known as we know it now. The world is not yet explored by the Church, much less occupied; but the exploration at least is carried so far that we know its plagues as our fathers knew them not; and if our hearts were rightly affected, we should weep over them as they never wept; for although the spread of Christianity has greatly multiplied the number of Christians, the increase of population has been such that more men are sinning and suffering now than were a hundred years ago.

Taking the forces of the Church, comparing them with the length and breadth of the world, and then asking, "Are these ever to be the means of converting all?" we feel that only the promise of God could inspire such a hope. But that promise is so confirmed, illustrated, and exalted by the success of the past century, that when we look back to the few faithful men in this country and in America, men in different circumstances and of different views, who then began in earnest to call the Churches to their work, and see how far their labors and those of their spiritual sons have advanced the kingdom of Christ beyond where it stood then, we are led to say: "Suppose that all the good men, now loving God and desiring his glory, were but to be multiplied in equal ratio during the next century, as those few have been during the last century--what an amazing stride would be made toward the conversion of the whole world!"

Is this too much to expect? Are we to conclude that the force of the animating Spirit is spent, and that an age of feebleness must succeed to one of power? To do so is fearfully to disbelieve at once the goodness and the faithfulness of our God. Some say that, because populations have become familiarized with the truths of the gospel, we are not to expect the same converting effects as when those truths were new. If this be so, we had better make way for a generation of rationalists and formalists, to prepare the ground again for spiritual cultivation! Some say that, because the age is so educated, intellectual, scientific, and inquisitive, men are not so susceptible of the influence of Christianity. Then shall we wait for an age less enlightened and less educated? Some say that the age is so unduly active, forcing enterprise and commerce to the point of absorbing every man, that religion is pushed aside. Must we then wait for a duller and more lethargic time? Some say that the Lord does not give us great success lest we should be uplifted. Is it his way to promote humility by giving small results to great agencies, or by giving great results to small ones? And would not results after the pentecostal scale make any of our agencies seem small? These are miserable withes wherewith to bind the giant Church of God. Away with them every one! After going round all the reasons which one hears ordinarily assigned for the greater direct success of preachers in the last century than now, our mind finds rest only in that one reason, which carries a world of rebuke and of humiliation to ourselves: they produced greater effects, simply because of the greater power of God within them.

Every ray of gospel truth that exists in any man is on our side. All intelligence, all intellectual activity, all vigor of character, are more for us than their opposites would be. In fact, they are very much the fruit, the indirect and secondary fruit, of the past triumphs of religion; for it is impossible that true godliness shall spread among any people, without stimulating their intellectual and social energies. It is hard to imagine a satire on the gospel more bitter than that it should be powerful when new to men, and impotent when familiar; that it should be good for the half barbarous, but not for those whom itself had refined; capable of captivating the inert, but incapable of commanding the masculine and the energetic. We expect ages not less instructed in Christian doctrine, but far more instructed; not intellectually duller, but more active; not darker as to science and literature, but inconceivably brighter; not slower as to invention, enterprise, and progress, but more vigorous by far. And am I to return to "the glorious gospel of the blessed God," whereto I feel that I and mine, my kindred, my country, the race from which I have sprung, the lands in which I have traveled, are all indebted for their purest and brightest things--and say to it, "When these bright ages come, thou shalt lag behind, perhaps recollected as one of the infantine instructors of the world, but distanced by the progress of man"? Let those who assign reasons for our want of fruitfulness which fairly sow the seeds of rationalism prepare to render an account when the fruit of their sowing comes to be reaped.

There is a natural tendency in any movement to lose intensity as it gains surface. When godliness becomes the habit of large numbers, it is not according to the laws of human nature that it should retain, in every individual, all the fervor which it must maintain, in order to exist at all, when it is the peculiarity of an extremely few. But if this fact is to be recognized, it must be remembered that the disadvantage which it presents is easily overcome by the power of grace; and, indeed, a natural counterpoise to this subduing tendency in practical religion is offered in an equally natural accumulative tendency. That decrease of distinction between the Church and the world which is so often noticed does not wholly arise from the Church becoming less Christian, but partly also from the world becoming less wicked. The testimony of a large number of decided men gradually and silently imposes on the world a respect for Christian principles, till the world tacitly accepts many of its moral laws and social standards at the hands of the Church. Every concession of this kind is an advantage to those Christians who mean to conquer all; while it is a seduction to those who repose in the idea of converting a small section of the people, leaving the rest to live in sin.

Put the ungodly in a minority, then vice becomes a social as well as a spiritual blemish, and religion an outward as well as an inward comfort. As the multitude of Christians goes on increasing, there is accumulative power of example, accumulative power of teaching, accumulative power of prayers, accumulative power of Christian training in families, accumulative power of purity in habits, all tending

in the one direction--to bring the public sentiment under the dominion of Christ. Towns and villages exist in this country where, within the memory of living men, very few godly persons were to be found; but now one-tenth, one-seventh, and even one-fifth in some cases, of their adult population, are professing to follow Christ, and living more or less worthily of that profession. Can any man help feeling that the unconverted people in such a town are much more likely to be converted than those living where the proportion of the godly is not more than one in a hundred, or one in a thousand? Who could not feel, who would not practically acknowledge the feeling of the accumulative power of Christian progress, if he had to decide in which of two towns his unconverted son should settle for life--one with a believer to every thousand of the population, or one with a believer to every ten? He would instantly say, "In the latter place the prospects of my son's conversion are vastly greater than in the other." What we should feel in an individual case we ought to feel on the great scale--to gather strength and hope, not feebleness, from past successes, and to become especially impatient of the continuance of sinners in those fields where notable triumphs of grace have already been achieved. What the Canaanites were to the Israelites of old, the unconverted dwelling in our towns and villages are to us at this day. They confuse and weaken us, they allure, they ensnare us, they lead our children astray, they rob us of the fruit of our schools, they damp the zeal of our young converts, they entice families into worldly practices, they tempt our tradesmen, they infect our churches; and never, until they are totally extirpated, can peace and righteousness flourish in our coasts. Impatient of their obstinacy everywhere, we ought to be especially so where victories, won by those who have preceded us, leave us comparatively little to do; for the uphill fight has been fought, the vantage ground gained, and now for the power to complete the triumph! The entire conversion of England and America, within the next fifty years, would not be so great a work for the Christians now existing as the progress made within the last hundred years has been for the Christians then existing. Is it rational to believe that God will less bless his servants in this nineteenth century than in the one that is gone, if they be equally faithful? or that he will shower on this generation of ours less marked benedictions than he did on the one to whom we are indebted for so much?

The single consideration of past progress suffices to prove that, on the ground of experience, we are not warranted to conclude that the conversion of the whole world is impossible. Much as may be argued from the slowness of the past progress of Christianity, the last century has so changed the aspect of affairs as now to cast the weight of the argument from experience decisively into the scale of hope. Many, however, will continue to look upon any consistent expectation of the general conversion of men as illusory: the objections of some resting on their views of the constancy of human nature, certain, they think, hereafter as heretofore, to present great numbers of unconquerable opponents to holiness; while others take higher ground, and believe that the general conversion of our race is contrary to the purpose of God.

When the question, "Is the conversion of the whole world possible?" is fairly put, the plain answer to it is obviously this: "It is possible, unless it be contrary to the will of God." If he has ordained that it is not to be, an infinite obstacle opposes it; if he has not so ordained, the obstacles which oppose it are finite, and therefore conquerable. Christians can overcome all things but a decree of God.

Has he, then, given us any declaration that he does not intend to renew the earth, as a whole, in righteousness? We do not mean to hold any controversy with those who have deliberately adopted the view that the Christian dispensation is a kind of interlude between the Lord's lifetime upon earth and a future earthly reign, meanwhile, bearing witness in his name--a witness for the conversion of a few and the condemnation of the many. We leave them with the praise of being perfectly consistent in expecting small results from the preaching of the gospel and with the responsibility of looking on that gospel in a light which warrants little faith.

We deal with those who regard the gospel as bona fide "good news" for every creature; "good news" which those who heard it before me were bound to tell to me; "good news" which I am bound to tell to every creature living, according to the extent of my opportunities; "good news" to the effect that "the grace of God, which bringeth salvation to all men, hath appeared"--news which could not be told to me as good, if it left any doubt whether it was or was not for me; "good news" to every creature, "a gospel for thee."

We take the first two announcements by a preacher under the Christian dispensation, to audiences of sinners, as intended for our instruction and imitation: "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins"; "God, having raised up his Son Jesus, sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities." Declarations less direct, personal, or comprehensive than these we have no manner of authority to deliver. We are to "command all men everywhere to repent"; to call upon every one of them to believe; to assure every one of them that Christ is "sent to bless him in turning him away from his iniquities."

Nor are we to make such proclamations under the feeling that, although it is our duty to do it, there is no intention on the part of God to second our testimony and give it effect. Hope in the result sustained the apostle in his work, according to his own avowal; for he says, "Therefore we both labor and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God, who is the Saviour of all men, specially of those that believe." This trust in the God and Saviour of all was enough to animate any man in labor and under reproach; and such a trust we should never cast away.

The question, whether or not the conversions of the first ages ought to be looked back to by us, as a standard at which to aim, is settled by one of the passages already quoted. After joyfully describing the conversion of the church in Ephesus, where "the word of the Lord" so "mightily grew and prevailed," St. Paul says, that God has done this, "that in the ages to come he might show the exceeding riches of his grace, in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus." We are living in what were, then, "the ages to come." On us the light of those "exceeding riches of grace" is shining--shining for our encouragement--shining that we may believe that in heathen cities, where great Dianas are adored, we also shall see "the word of God mightily grow and prevail," heathen rites abandoned, bad books consumed, and the craft of idol-makers destroyed.

While this collective number of conversions is given to us as an encouragement, the most remarkable of all individual conversions is placed before us in the same light. "Howbeit," says St. Paul, "for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show forth all long-suffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting." Thus we are deliberately

forewarned to take the most singular conversion that ever occurred in the early Church, not as a discouragement because of its specialty, but as an intentional manifestation of the wonderful grace of the Redeemer, by which every sinner in all ages, who would fain "find mercy," may encourage himself. The persecutor Paul, converted and forgiven, is for a pattern to individual believers in "the ages to come." The great multitude of "children of wrath" in Ephesus who were made to "sit in heavenly places in Christ Jesus," are also to us, of "the ages to come," a pattern of the "exceeding riches of grace." Whether our faith be tried in respect to the possibility of the conversion of an individual as unlikely as Saul, or of a number as great as the church of Ephesus, in either case we should believe that the ancient grace is free and mighty this day. Thus trusting in "God, who is the Saviour of all men," we shall both cheerfully "labor and suffer reproach."

The same relation which we have shown to exist between hope and labor is also pointed out to us as existing between hope and prayer. "I exhort, therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men." Here no one doubts that we are literally commanded to pray for every human being; but if we did not carefully attend to the context, we might run away with a vague idea that we were only to pray as an expression of good will, and that for temporal and national blessings, especially as allusion is made to "kings, and all that are in authority"; that, in fact, the "prayers, and supplications, and intercession, and giving of thanks, for all men," do not mean that we are to pray, supplicate, and intercede, that all men may be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth; for that would only be asking what God wills should never be, and therefore what could not be acceptable to him. But, as if expressly to anticipate this unbelief, the apostle adds: "For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour; who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and one Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; who gave himself a ransom for all, a testimony in due time."

Here our encouragement in prayer, supplication, and intercession for all men is grounded first on the clear declaration that such prayer is "good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour"--"our Saviour" giving intensity to the expression, as if reminding us that he who has saved us must be one to whom it is good and acceptable that we should seek the salvation of all. It is further grounded on the express declaration of his will regarding others, that he "will have them to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth."

Here is not only the assurance that we are right in praying that they may be saved, but right in praying that the truth may be brought to all, and that they may be saved through its instrumentality; praying, in fact, for the universal diffusion of Christ's gospel, and the universal salvation of men in consequence. It is further supported on the ground of the unity of God, the unity of the Mediator between God and men, and the unity of man as regarded by his mediating atonement: "One God, and one Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself a ransom for all, a testimony in due time."

We have, then, the clear example of the first preachers, the express declaration that the early conversions were as a pattern for the ages to come, the statement that trust in God as the Saviour of all men was the animating strength under apostolic toil and shame, the command to pray for all, and the most formally stated warrant for such prayers boldly to lay hold upon the promises of God.

Many who admit that the scriptural argument points in this direction, yet, looking at human nature, the present condition of mankind, the proportion of Christian agency to population, and the past career of man, will, on the whole, conclude that the conversion of the world is not to be expected. They will also ask us how we can reconcile such an expectation with the free agency of man. We will no further answer them than by recalling the fact that every additional conversion to some extent, however slight, changes the condition of society, and, in so doing, affects the motives which act upon the unconverted, throwing a greater weight upon the side of goodness. A few more decided advances on the part of the Church, in some countries of Christendom, would cast a preponderating weight of social motives on the side of godliness, leaving little to be contended against but the depravity of man's heart, which, even in the purest condition of society, would be enough to demand the most zealous care for the conversion of each human being.

This bears first on the general question of natural motives, next on the particular one as to reconciling faith, for the general regeneration of men, with their free agency. We readily admit that, logically, we cannot reconcile them, and certainly we are not anxious to attempt it. All the difficulties which meet us in soberly expecting the conversion of the entire world, equally meet us in soberly expecting the conversion of an entire family. Every question of free agency, motives, human nature, past experience, which enters into the one, enters into the other, though on a smaller scale. But it is only the scale that differs; the elements are the same. Yet who that has felt the faith and love of Christ within him, and has kindred dear to his own heart, has not again and again pleaded that they might all appear, "no wanderer lost, a family in heaven"? Who does not feel that to exercise faith that such a prayer shall be answered is good and wise, and acceptable to God? In fact, all the difficulty exists as to faith for the conversion of any one individual.

The difference between preaching the gospel with a full expectation of doing no more than saving small companies of saints from amid multitudes of sinners, on whose shipwreck no influence is to be exercised beyond holding them a light to sink by, and of looking upon every converted man as one rescued from a common danger, who is immediately to join in rescuing the rest--is such, that in the one case, when a little is accomplished, it is looked upon as what the gospel was sent to do; while, in the other case, every little is taken as but an earnest of the great, and the great as an earnest of the universal. While we aim at few, we shall win but few; for, that our success, it is looked upon as what the gospel was sent to do; while, in the other case, every little is taken as but an earnest of the great, and the great as an earnest of the universal.

"Streams In The Desert" Mrs. L.B. Cowman

Likewise also the Spirit helpeth our infirmities; for we know not what to pray for as we ought; but the Spirit itself 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).

This is the deep mystery of prayer. This is the delicate divine mechanism which words cannot interpret, and which theology cannot explain, but which the humblest believer knows even when he does not understand.

Oh, the burdens that we love to bear and cannot understand! Oh, the inarticulate out-reachings of our hearts for things we cannot comprehend! And yet we know they are an echo from the throne and a whisper from the heart of God. It is often a groan rather than a song, a burden rather than a buoyant wing. But it is a blessed burden, and it is a groan whose undertone is praise and unutterable joy. It is "a groaning which cannot be uttered." We could not ourselves express it always, and sometimes we do not understand any more than that God is praying in us, for something that needs His touch and that He understands.

And so we can just pour out the fullness of our heart, the burden of our spirit, the sorrow that crushes us, and know that He hears, He loves, He understands, He receives; and He separates from our prayer all that is imperfect, ignorant and wrong, and presents the rest, with the incense of the great High Priest, before the throne on high; and our prayer is heard, accepted and answered in His name.

--A. B. Simpson

It is not necessary to be always speaking to God or always hearing from God, to have communion with Him; there is an inarticulate fellowship more sweet than words. The little child can sit all day long beside its busy mother and, although few words are spoken on either side, and both are busy, the one at his absorbing play, the other at her engrossing work, yet both are in perfect fellowship. He knows that she is there, and she knows that he is all right.

So the saint and the Saviour can go on for hours in the silent fellowship of love, and he be busy about the most common things, and yet conscious that every little thing he does is touched with the complexion of His presence, and the sense of His approval and blessing.

And then, when pressed with burdens and troubles too complicated to put into words and too mysterious to tell or understand, how sweet it is to fall back into His blessed arms, and just sob out the sorrow that we cannot speak!

--Selected

(Amplified Bible; Joyce Meyers; 2006; Faith Words; Scripture; Commentaries; pages 828-830)

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