

OUR UNANSWERED PRAYERS

by Edward B. Bagby

There is much of what is called prayer. Man has an instinctive recognition of One higher than himself, to whom he is accountable and with whom he is capable of fellowship. When dangers threaten and sorrows oppress and needs are sharp and great, he turns for help to this high and holy One.

It is true that many prayers do not seem to be answered. The cloud which threatened, breaks; the blow falls. He asks and receives not; seeks, but does not find; knocks until the hands are bruised and bleeding, and the question in job returns, "What is the Almighty that we should serve him, and what profit shall we have if we pray to him?"

The trouble may be because of an error upon our part as to the nature of prayer, or as to the conditions of acceptable prayer, or as to the results of prayer.

1. *Many regard prayer as synonymous with petition.* Let us view the subject in the light of the filial relation. "I want a piece of bread!" "Give me a penny!" "Buy me some candy!" are requests heard frequently in the home. But this is not the sole or chief theme in the intercourse between parent and child. A better illustration of prayer is that of the boy who came in and sat down quietly where his father was working. "Do you want anything, son?" "No, father, I only wanted to be with you." Prayer is not some magical formula for securing Heaven's treasures, it is not teasing God into granting something which may or may not be best for us. Prayer is communion. Prayer is adoration-the child's "I love you, mother." Prayer is confession-"I am sorry." Prayer -is thanksgiving-"I thank you." Prayer, too, is petition.

2. But God *does not promise to answer our prayers unconditionally.* If he did, it would mean that he would abdicate the throne, and in its place there would be set up every weak and whimsical and selfish human will. "If ye shall ask anything" is the promise, but the condition[s] [are]:

(1) *In my name.* To collect money in the name of the Government is not to put the money into your own pocket. "It is to seek what He seeks, to aid in promoting what is dear to his heart." "In his name" is equivalent to "according to his will." "This is the boldness which we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will, he heareth us." We ask and receive not because we ask amiss."

(2) *Faith.* I wrote a letter the other day-a request for a remittance. I watched for the postman every morning, and looked eagerly through the mail, until this particular letter came. I am afraid I do not do that with my prayers. Most of us are like the boy who rings the bell and runs away before the door is opened. Luther said: "What does it signify to have prayed, if you do not know what God says to it?" And Habbakuk : "I will stand upon the watch-tower, and watch and see what he will say." "And all things whatsoever ye ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive." "Without faith it is impossible to please God."

(3) Then *we must work as we pray*. Daniel Quorm, an eccentric character, tells in his "Religious Notions" of stopping overnight with a gentleman who seemed to be a very pious kind of man. At family prayers in the morning he prayed that he might be kept from sin and have a childlike spirit, that he might have the mind of Christ, and that the love of God might be shed abroad in his heart by the Holy Ghost. But all that day Quorm heard him finding fault and scolding everybody in the house and field. At night he said, "You must be a very disappointed man." "Why so?" "This morning you prayed for the mind of Christ and the love of God, etc., and your prayer does not seem to have been answered." It was a favorite illustration of T. L. Cuyler that many prayers are like letters sent to the Dead-letter Office, some because they are not properly addressed, some because they contain improper matter, and others because they are not prepaid.

3. Then *we may be mistaken as to the results of prayer*. The answer may be a delay and not a denial. As in the case of the Syrophenician woman, the delay may be to test, develop and exemplify faith. When winds are contrary, He may not come till the fourth watch, but He will come. Sometimes the result may be the reverse of what we expect and yet the prayer be answered. Paul asked for the removal of "the thorn," but (did not complain when there was granted him instead the "sufficient grace." Jesus prayed that the cup might pass away from him. God willed otherwise. Now "he sees of the travail of his soul and is satisfied."

God delights to answer prayer. Let us think of prayer as Trench says: "Not an overcoming of God's reluctance, but as laying hold of his highest willingness." Recall the parable of the friend at midnight. If the surly and disobliging man would arise and give three loaves of bread to an importunate neighbor to stop his knocking, how much more will our Father, who never sleeps nor slumbers, from his bountiful store give good gifts to his children. Put God to the test, and learn, as Mr. Spurgeon says, "that he is better than our fears, better than our hopes, and, finally, better even than our wishes."