

Prayer and Faith

by E.M. Bounds

Faith is the foundation of Christian character and the security of the soul, and it is the initial quality in the heart of any man who essays to talk to the unseen.

Scripture: Isaiah 26:3, Matthew 6:11, Matthew 17:20, Mark 11:24, Luke 18:8, John 14:13-14, Philippians 4:6-7, Hebrews 11:1, James 1:6, 1 Peter 1:5

Topics: "Faith", "Prayer"

Description

E.M. Bounds emphasizes the foundational role of faith in prayer, asserting that true prayer is an expression of faith that claims God's promises and power. He illustrates that faith is essential for a vibrant spiritual life, as it enables believers to trust in God's ability to answer prayers, even amidst delays and trials. Bounds encourages believers to focus their prayers on present needs, trusting that God will provide for tomorrow, and highlights the importance of obedience and patience in the life of faith. He concludes that faith, when centered on Christ, empowers believers to pray effectively and experience God's blessings.

Transcript

IN any study of the principles and procedure of prayer, of its activities and enterprises, first place, must, of necessity, be given to faith. It is the initial quality in the heart of any man who essays to talk to the unseen. He must, out of sheer helplessness, stretch forth hands of faith. He must believe, where he cannot prove. In the ultimate issue, prayer is simply faith, claiming its natural yet marvelous prerogatives-faith taking possession of its illimitable inheritance. True godliness is just as true, steady, and persevering in the realm of faith as it is in the province of prayer. Moreover: when faith ceases to pray, it ceases to live.

Faith does the impossible because it brings God to undertake for us, and nothing is impossible with God. How great-without qualification or limitation-is the power of faith! If doubt be banished from the heart, and unbelief made stranger there, what we ask of God shall surely come to pass, and a believer hath vouchsafed to him "whatsoever he saith."

Prayer projects faith on God, and God on the world. Only God can move mountains, but faith and prayer move God. In his cursing of the fig tree our Lord demonstrated his power. Following that, he proceeded to declare, that large powers were committed to faith and prayer, not in order to kill but to make alive, not to blast but to bless.

At this point in our study, we turn to a saying of our Lord, which there is need to emphasize, since it is the very keystone of the arch of faith and prayer.

Therefore I say unto you, What things soever ye desire when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them.

We should ponder well that statement-"Believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them." Here is described a faith which realizes, which appropriates, which takes. Such faith is a consciousness of the divine, an experienced communion, a realized certainty.

Is faith growing or declining as the years go by? Does faith stand strong and foursquare, these days, as iniquity abounds and the love of many grows cold? Does faith maintain its hold, as religion tends to become a mere formality and worldliness increasingly prevails? The inquiry of our Lord, may, with great appropriateness, be ours. "When the Son of Man cometh," he asks, "shall he find faith on the earth?" We believe that he will, and it is ours, in this our day, to see to it that the lamp of faith is trimmed and burning, lest he come who shall come, and that right early.

Faith is the foundation of Christian character and the security of the soul. When Jesus was looking forward to Peter's denial, and cautioning him against it, he said unto his disciple:

Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, to sift you as wheat; but I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not.

Our Lord was declaring a central truth; it was Peter's faith he was seeking to guard; for well he knew that when faith is broken down, the foundations of spiritual life give way, and the entire structure of religious experience falls. It was Peter's faith which needed guarding. Hence Christ's solicitude for the welfare of his disciple's soul and his determination to fortify Peter's faith by his own all-prevailing prayer.

In his second epistle, Peter has this idea in mind when speaking of growth in grace as a measure of safety in the Christian life, and as implying fruitfulness.

And besides this, giving diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; and to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness.

Of this additive process, faith was the starting point-the basis of the other ;races of the Spirit. Faith was the foundation on which other things were to be built. Peter does not enjoin his readers to add to works or gifts or virtues out to faith. Much depends on starting right in this business of growing in grace. There is a divine order, of which Peter was aware; and so he goes on to declare that we are to give diligence to making our calling and election sure, which election is rendered certain adding to faith which, in turn, is done by constant, earnest praying. Thus faith is kept alive by prayer, and every step taken, in this adding of grace to grace, is accompanied by prayer.

The faith which creates powerful praying is the faith which centers itself in a powerful person. Faith in Christ's ability to do and to do greatly, is the faith which prays greatly. Thus the leper lay hold upon the power of Christ. Lord, if thou wilt," he cried, "Thou canst make me clean." In this instance, we are shown how faith centered in Christ's ability to do, and how it secured the healing power.

It was concerning this very point, that Jesus questioned the blind men who came to him for healing:

"Believe ye that I am able to do this?" They said unto him, "Yea, Lord." Then touched he their eyes, saying, "According to your faith be it unto you."

It was to inspire faith in his ability to do that Jesus left behind him, that last, great statement, which, in the final analysis, is a ringing challenge to faith. "All power," he declared, "is given unto me in heaven and in earth."

Again: faith is obedient; it goes when commanded, as did the nobleman, who came to Jesus, in the day of his flesh, and whose son was grievously sick.

Moreover: such faith acts. Like the man who was born blind, it goes to wash in the pool of Siloam when told to wash. Like Peter on Gennesaret it casts the net where Jesus commands, instantly, without question or doubt. Such faith takes away the stone from the grave of Lazarus promptly. A praying faith keeps the commandments of God and does those things which are well pleasing in his sight. It asks, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" and answers quickly, "Speak, Lord, thy servant heareth." Obedience helps faith, and faith, in turn, helps obedience. To do God's will is essential to true faith, and faith is necessary to implicit obedience.

Yet faith is called upon, and that right often to wait in patience before God, and is prepared for God's seeming delays in answering prayer. Faith does not grow disheartened because prayer is not immediately honored; it takes God at his Word, and lets him take what time he chooses in fulfilling his purposes, and in carrying on his work. There is bound to be much delay and long days of waiting for true faith, but faith accepts the conditions-knows there will be delays in answering prayer, and regards such delays as times of testing, in the which, it is privileged to show its mettle, and the stern stuff of which it is made.

The case of Lazarus was an instance of where there was delay, where the faith of two good women was sorely tried: Lazarus was critically ill, and his sisters sent for Jesus. But, without any known reason, our Lord delayed his going to the relief of his sick friend. The plea was urgent and touching-"Lord, behold, he whom thou lovest is sick"-but the master is not moved by it, and the women's earnest request seemed to fall on deaf ears. What a trial to faith! Furthermore: our Lord's tardiness appeared to bring about hopeless disaster. While Jesus tarried, Lazarus died.

But the delay of Jesus was exercised in the interests of a greater good. Finally, he makes his way to the home in Bethany.

Then said Jesus unto them plainly, "Lazarus is dead. And I am glad for your sakes, that I was not there, to the intent ye may believe; nevertheless let us go unto him."

Fear not, O tempted and tried believer, Jesus will come, if patience is exercised, and faith holds fast. His delay will serve to make his coming the more richly blessed. Pray on. Wait on. You cannot fail. If Christ delay, wait for him. In his own good time, he will come, and will not tarry.

Delay is often the test and the strength of faith. How much patience is required when these times of testing come! Yet faith gathers strength by waiting and praying. Patience has its perfect work in the school of delay. In some instances, delay is of the very essence of the prayer. God has to do many things, antecedent to giving the final answer-things which are essential to the lasting good of him who is requesting favor at his hands.

Jacob prayed, with point and ardor, to be delivered from Esau. But before that prayer could be answered, there was much to be done with, and for Jacob. He must be changed, as well as Esau. Jacob had to be made into a new man, before Esau could be. Jacob had to be converted to God, before Esau could be converted to Jacob.

Among the large and luminous utterances of Jesus concerning prayer, none is more arresting than this:

Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go unto my Father. And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If ye shall ask anything in my name, I will do it.

How wonderful are these statements of what God will do in answer to prayer! Of how great importance these ringing words, prefaced, as they are, with the most solemn verity! Faith in Christ is the basis of all working, and of all praying. All wonderful works depend on wonderful praying, and all praying is done in the name of Jesus Christ. Amazing lesson, of wondrous simplicity, is this praying in the name of the Lord Jesus! All other conditions are depreciated, everything else is renounced, save Jesus only. The name of Christ-the person of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ-must be supremely sovereign, in the hour and article of prayer.

If Jesus dwells at the fountain of my life; if the currents of his life have displaced and superseded all self-currents; if implicit obedience to him is the inspiration and force of every movement of my life, then he can safely commit the praying to my will, and pledge himself, by an obligation as profound as his own nature, that whatsoever is asked shall be granted. Nothing can be clearer, more distinct, more unlimited both in application and extent, than the exhortation and urgency of Christ, "Have faith in God."

Faith covers temporal as well as spiritual needs. Faith dispels all undue anxiety and needless care about what shall be eaten, what shall be drunk, what shall be worn. Faith lives in the present, and regards the day as being sufficient unto the evil thereof. It lives day by day, and dispels all fears for the morrow. Faith brings great ease of mind and perfect peace of heart.

Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusted in thee.

When we pray, "Give us this day our daily bread," we are, in a measure, hutting tomorrow out of our prayer. We do not live in tomorrow but in oday We do not seek tomorrow's grace or tomorrow's bread. They thrive best, and get most out of life, who live in the living present. They pray best who pray for today's needs, not for tomorrow's, which may render our prayers unnecessary and redundant by not existing at all!

True prayers are born of present trials and present needs. Bread, for today, is bread enough. Bread given for today is the strongest sort of pledge that there will be bread tomorrow. Victory today, is the assurance of victory tomorrow. Our-prayers need to be focused upon the present. We must trust God today, and leave the morrow entirely with him. The present is ours; the future belongs to God. Prayer is the task and duty of each recurring day-daily prayer for daily needs.

As every day demands its bread, so every day demands its prayer. No amount of praying, done today, will suffice for tomorrow's praying. On the other hand, no praying for tomorrow is of any great value to us today Today's manna is what we need; tomorrow God will see that our needs are supplied. This is the faith which God seeks to inspire. So leave tomorrow, with its cares, its needs, its troubles, in God's hands.

There is no storing tomorrow's grace or tomorrow's praying; neither is there any laying-up of today's grace, to meet tomorrow's necessities. We cannot have tomorrow's grace, we cannot eat tomorrow's bread, we cannot do tomorrow's praying. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof; and, most assuredly, if we possess faith, sufficient also, will be the good.

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