

PLEADING

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, OCTOBER 29TH, 1871, BY

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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON. ¹

“But I am poor and needy: make haste unto me, O God: thou art my help and my deliverer; O Lord, make no tarrying.”—Psalm 70:5.

YOUNG painters were anxious, in the olden times, to study under the great masters. They concluded that they should more easily attain to excellence if they entered the schools of eminent men. At this present time, men will pay large premiums that their sons may be apprenticed or articed to those who best understand their trades or professions; now, if any of us would learn the sacred art and mystery of prayer, it is well for us to study the productions of the greatest masters of that science. I am unable to point out one who understood it better than did the psalmist David. So well did he know how to praise, that his psalms have become the language of good men in all ages; and so well did he understand how to pray, that if we catch his spirit, and follow his mode of prayer, we shall have learned to plead with God after the most prevalent sort. Place before you, first of all, David's Son and David's Lord, that most mighty of all intercessors, and, next to him, you shall find David to be one of the most admirable models for your imitation.

We shall consider our text, then, as one of the productions of a great master in spiritual matters, and we will study it, praying all the while that God will help us to pray after the like fashion.

In our text we have the soul of a successful pleader under four aspects: we view, first, *the soul confessing*: “I am poor and needy.” You have, next, the *soul pleading*, for he makes a plea out of his poor condition, and adds, “Make haste unto me, O God!” You see, thirdly, *a soul in its urgency*, for he cries, “Make haste,” and he varies the expression but keeps the same idea: “Make no tarrying.” And you have, in the fourth and last view, *a soul grasping God*, for the psalmist puts it thus: “Thou art my help and my deliverer;” thus with both hands he lays hold upon his God, so as not to let him go till a blessing is obtained.

I. To begin, then, we see in this model of supplication, A SOUL CONFESSING. The wrestler strips before he enters upon the contest, and confession does the like for the man who is about to plead with God. A racer on the plains of prayer cannot hope to win, unless, by confession, repentance, and faith, he lays aside every weight of sin.

Now, let it be ever remembered that confession is absolutely needful to the sinner when he first seeks a Saviour. It is not possible for thee, O seeker, to obtain peace for thy troubled heart, till thou

¹ Spurgeon, C. H. (1871). Pleading. In *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons* (Vol. 17, pp. 601–612). London: Passmore & Alabaster.

shalt have acknowledged thy transgression and thine iniquity before the Lord. Thou mayest do what thou wilt, ay, even attempt to believe in Jesus, but thou shalt find that the faith of God's elect is not in thee, unless thou art willing to make a full confession of thy transgression, and lay bare thy heart before God. We do not usually think of giving charity to those who do not acknowledge that they need it: the physician does not send his medicine to those who are not sick. There is too much to be done in the world of necessary work for us to undertake works of supererogation; and, surely, to clothe those who are not naked, and to feed those that are not hungry, is to attempt superfluous work, which will bring us no credit. God will not do this: you must be empty before you can be filled by him, and you must confess your emptiness, too, or else assuredly he will not come to fill the full, nor to lift up those who are already high enough in their own esteem. The blind man in the gospels had to feel his blindness, and to sit by the wayside begging; if he had entertained a doubt as to whether he were blind or not, the Lord would have passed him by. He opens the eyes of those who confess their blindness, but of others, he says, "Because ye say we see, therefore, your sin remaineth." He asks of those who are brought to him, "What wilt thou that I should do unto thee?" in order that their need may be publicly avowed. It must be so with all of us: we must offer the confession, or we cannot gain the benediction.

Let me speak especially to you who desire to find peace with God, and salvation through the precious blood: you will do well to make your confession before God very frank, very sincere, very explicit. Surely you have nothing to hide, for there is nothing that you can hide. He knows your guilt already, but he would have *you* know it, and therefore he bids you confess it. Go into the details of your sin in your secret acknowledgments before God; strip yourself of all excuses, make no apologies; say, "Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight: that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest." Acknowledge the evil of sin, ask God to make you feel it; do not treat it as a trifle, for it is none. To redeem the sinner from the effect of sin Christ himself must needs die, and unless you be delivered from it you must die eternally. Therefore, play not with sin; do not confess it as though it were some venial fault, which would not have been noticed unless God had been too severe; but labour to see sin as God sees it, as an offence against all that is good, a rebellion against all that is kind; see it to be treason, to be ingratitude, to be a mean and base thing. Do not think that you can improve your condition before God by painting your case in brighter colours than it should be. Blacken it: if it were possible blacken it, but it is not possible. When you feel your sin most you have not half felt it; when you confess it most fully you do not know a tithe of it; but oh, to the utmost of your ability make a clean breast of it, and say, "I have sinned against heaven, and before thee." Acknowledge the sins of your youth and your manhood, the sins of your body and of your soul, the sins of omission and of commission, sins against the law and offences against the gospel; acknowledge all, neither for a moment seek to deny one portion of the evil with which God's law, your own conscience, and his Holy Spirit justly charge you.

And oh, soul, if thou wouldst get peace and approval with God in prayer, confess the ill desert of thy sin. Submit thyself to whatever divine justice may sentence thee to endure: confess that the deepest hell is thy desert, and confess this not with thy lips only, but with thy soul. Let this be the doleful ditty of thine inmost heart—

"Should sudden vengeance seize my breath,
I must pronounce thee just in death;
And, if my soul were sent to hell,
Thy righteous law approves it well."

If thou wilt condemn thyself, God will acquit thee; if thou wilt put the rope about thy neck, and sentence thyself, then he who otherwise would have sentenced thee will say, "I forgive thee, through the merit of my Son." But never expect that the King of heaven will pardon a traitor, if he will not confess and forsake his treason. Even the tenderest father expects that the child should humble himself when he has offended, and he will not withdraw his frown from him till with tears he has said, "Father, I have sinned." Darest thou expect God to humble himself to thee, and would it not be so if he did not constrain thee to humble thyself to him? Wouldst thou have him connive at thy faults and wink at thy transgressions? He will have mercy, but he must be holy. He is ready to forgive, but not to tolerate sin; and, therefore, he cannot let thee be forgiven if thou huggest thy sins, or if thou presumest to say, "I have not sinned." Hasten, then, O seeker, hasten, I pray thee, to the mercy seat with this upon thy lips: "I am poor and needy, I am sinful, I am lost; have pity on me." With such an acknowledgment thou beginnest thy prayer well, and through Jesus thou shalt prosper in it.

Beloved hearers, the same principle applies to the church of God. We are praying for a display of the Holy Spirit's power in this church, and, in order to successful pleading in this matter, it is necessary that we should unanimously make the confession of our text, "I am poor and needy." We must own that we are powerless in this business. Salvation is of the Lord and we cannot save a single soul. The Spirit of God is treasured up in Christ, and we must seek him of the great head of the church. We cannot command the Spirit, and yet we can do nothing without him. He bloweth where he listeth. We must deeply feel and honestly acknowledge this. Will you not heartily assent to it my brethren and sisters at this hour. May I not ask you unanimously to renew the confession this morning? We must also acknowledge that we are not worthy that the Holy Spirit should condescend to work with us and by us. There is no fitness in us for his purposes, except he shall give us that fitness. Our sins might well provoke him to leave us: he has striven with us, he has been tender towards us, but he might well go away and say, "I will no more shine upon that church, and no more bless that ministry." Let us feel our unworthiness, it will be a good preparation for earnest prayer; for, mark you, brethren, God will have his church before he blesses it know that the blessing is altogether from himself. "Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord." The career of Gideon was a very remarkable one, and it commenced with two most instructive signs. I think our heavenly Father would have all of us learn the very same lesson which he taught to Gideon, and when we have mastered that lesson, he will use us for his own purposes. You remember Gideon laid a fleece upon the barn floor, and in the morning all round was dry and the fleece alone was wet. God alone had saturated the fleece so that he could wring it out, and its moisture was not due to its being placed in a favourable situation, for all around was dry. He would have us learn that, if the dew of his grace fills any one of us with its heavenly moisture, it is not because we lie upon the barn-floor of a ministry which God usually blesses, or because we are in a church which the Lord graciously visits; but we must be made to see that the visitations of his Spirit are fruits of the Lord's sovereign grace, and gifts of his infinite love, and not of the will of man, neither by man. But then the miracle was reversed, for, as old Thomas Fuller says, "God's miracles will bear to be turned inside out and look as glorious one way as another." The next night the fleece was dry and all around was wet. For sceptics might have said, "Yes, but a fleece would naturally attract moisture, and if there were any in the air, it would be likely to be absorbed by the wool." But, lo, on this occasion, the dew is not where it might be expected to be, even though it lies thickly all around. Damp is the stone and dry is the fleece. So God will have us know that he does not give us his grace because of any natural adaptation in us to receive it, and even where he has given a preparedness of heart to receive, he will have us understand that his grace and his Spirit

are most free in action, and sovereign in operation: and that he is not bound to work after any rule of our making. If the fleece be wet he bedews it, and that not because it is a fleece, but because he chooses to do so. He will have all the glory of all his grace from first to last. Come then, my brethren, and become disciples to this truth. Consider that from the great Father of lights every good and perfect gift must come. We are his workmanship, he must work all our works in us. Grace is not to be commanded by our position or condition: the wind bloweth where it listeth, the Lord works and no man can hinder; but if he works not, the mightiest and the most zealous labour but in vain.

It is very significant that before Christ fed the thousands, he made the disciples sum up all their provisions. It was well to let them see how low the commissariat had become, for then when the crowds were fed they could not say the basket fed them, nor that the lad had done it. God will make us feel how little are our barley loaves, and how small our fishes, and compel us to enquire, "What are they among so many?" When the Saviour bade his disciples cast the net on the right side of the ship, and they dragged such a mighty shoal to land, he did not work the miracle till they had confessed that they had toiled all the night and had taken nothing. They were thus taught that the success of their fishery was dependent upon the Lord, and that it was not their net, nor their way of dragging it, nor their skill and art in handling their vessels, but that altogether and entirely their success came from their Lord. We must get down to this, and the sooner we come to it the better.

Before the ancient Jews kept the passover, observe what they did. The unleavened bread is to be brought in, and the paschal lamb to be eaten; but there shall be no unleavened bread, and no paschal lamb, till they have purged out the old leaven. If you have any old strength and self-confidence; if you have anything that is your own, and is, therefore, leavened, it must be swept right out; there must be a bare cupboard before there can come in the heavenly provision, upon which the spiritual passover can be kept. I thank God when he cleans us out; I bless his name when he brings us to feel our soul-poverty as a church, for then the blessing will be sure to come.

One other illustration will show this, perhaps, more distinctly still. Behold Elijah with the priests of Baal at Carmel. The test appointed to decide Israel's choice was this—the God that answereth by fire let him be God. Baal's priests invoked the heavenly flame in vain. Elijah is confident that it will come upon his sacrifice, but he is also sternly resolved that the false priests and the fickle people shall not imagine that he himself had produced the fire. He determines to make it clear that there is no human contrivance, trickery, or manœuvre about the matter. The flame should be seen to be of the Lord, and of the Lord alone. Remember the stern prophet's command, "Fill four barrels with water, and pour it on the burnt sacrifice, and on the wood. And he said, Do it a second time; and they did it a second time. And he said, Do it a third time; and they did it a third time. And the water ran round about the altar; and he filled the trench also with water." There could be no latent fires there. If there had been any combustibles or chemicals calculated to produce fire after the manner of the cheats of the time, they would all have been damped and spoiled. When no one could imagine that man could burn the sacrifice, then the prophet lifted up his eyes to heaven, and began to plead, and down came the fire of the Lord, which consumed the burnt sacrifice and the wood, and the altar stones and the dust, and even licked up the water that was in the trench. Then when all the people saw it they fell on their faces, and they said, "Jehovah is the God; Jehovah is the God." The Lord in this church, if he means greatly to bless us, may send us the trial of pouring on the water once, and twice, and thrice; he may discourage us, grieve us, and try us, and bring us low, till all shall see that it is not of the preacher,

it is not of the organization, it is not of man, but altogether of God, the Alpha and the Omega, who worketh all things according to the council of his will.

Thus I have shown you that for a successful season of prayer the best beginning is confession that we are poor and needy.

II. Secondly, after the soul has unburdened itself of all weights of merit and self-sufficiency, it proceeds to prayer, and we have before us A SOUL PLEADING. "I am poor and needy, make haste unto me, O God. Thou art my help and my deliverer: O Lord, make no tarrying." The careful reader will perceive four pleas in this single verse.

Upon this topic I would remark that it is the habit of faith, when she is praying, to use pleas. Mere prayer sayers, who do not pray at all, forget to argue with God; but those who would prevail bring forth their reasons and their strong arguments, and they debate the question with the Lord. They who play at wrestling catch here and there at random, but those who are really wrestling have a certain way of grasping the opponent—a certain mode of throwing, and the like; they work according to order and rule. Faith's art of wrestling is to plead with God, and say with holy boldness, "Let it be thus and thus, for these reasons." Hosea tells us of Jacob at Jabbok, "that there he spake with us;" from which I understand that Jacob instructed us by his example. Now, the two pleas which Jacob used were God's precept and God's promise. First, he said, "Thou saidst unto me, Return unto thy country and to thy kindred:" as much as if he put it thus:—"Lord, I am in difficulty, but I have come here through obedience to thee. Thou didst tell me to do this; now, since thou commandest me to come hither, into the very teeth of my brother Esau, who comes to meet me like a lion, Lord, thou canst not be so unfaithful as to bring me into danger and then leave me in it." This was sound reasoning, and it prevailed with God. Then Jacob also urged a promise: "Thou saidst, I will surely do thee good." Among men, it is a masterly way of reasoning when you can challenge your opponent with his own words: you may quote other authorities, and he may say, "I deny their force;" but, when you quote a man against himself, you foil him completely. When you bring a man's promise to his mind, he must either confess himself to be unfaithful and changeable, or, if he holds to being the same, and being true to his word, you have him, and you have won your will of him. Oh, brethren, let us learn thus to plead the precepts, the promises, and whatever else may serve our turn; but let us always have something to plead. Do not reckon you have prayed unless you have pleaded, for pleading is the very marrow of prayer. He who pleads well knows the secret of prevailing with God, especially if he pleads the blood of Jesus, for that unlocks the treasury of heaven. Many keys fit many locks, but the master-key is the blood and the name of him that died but rose again, and ever lives in heaven to save unto the uttermost.

Faith's pleas are plentiful, and this is well, for faith is placed in divers positions, and needs them all. She hath many needs, and having a keen eye she perceives that there are pleas to be urged in every case. I will not, therefore, tell you all faith's pleas, but I will just mention some of them, enough to let you see how abundant they are. Faith will plead all the attributes of God. "Thou art just, therefore spare thou the soul for whom the Saviour died. Thou art merciful, blot out my transgressions. Thou art good, reveal thy bounty to thy servant. Thou art immutable—thou hast done thus and thus to others of thy servants, do thus unto me. Thou art faithful, canst thou break thy promise, canst thou turn away from thy covenant?" Rightly viewed, all the perfections of Deity become pleas for faith.

Faith will boldly plead all God's gracious relationships. She will say to him, "Art thou not the Creator? Wilt thou forsake the work of thine own hands? Art thou not the Redeemer, thou hast redeemed thy servant, wilt thou cast me away?" Faith usually delights to lay hold upon the fatherhood of God. This is generally one of her master points: when she brings this into the field

she wins the day. "Thou art a Father, and wouldst thou chasten us as though thou wouldst kill? A Father, and wilt thou not provide? A Father, and hast thou no sympathy and no bowels of compassion? A Father, and canst thou deny what thine own child asks of thee?" Whenever I am impressed with the divine majesty, and so, perhaps, a little dispirited in prayer, I find the short and sweet remedy is to remember that, although he is a great King, and infinitely glorious, I am his child, and no matter who the father is, the child may always be bold with his father. Yes, faith can plead any and all of the relationships in which God stands to his chosen.

Faith, too, can ply heaven with the divine promises. I need not enlarge here, for this I trust you all do so continually. When you can as it were bring home the Lord's word to himself, it is well. That is the conquering argument, "Do as thou hast said." "Thou hast spoken it, and thou hast made thy promise to be yea and amen in Christ Jesus to thine own glory by us, wilt thou not fulfil it? Wilt thou run back from thine own word? Wilt thou fail to carry out thine own declaration? That be far from thee, Lord!" Brethren, we want to be more business like and common sense with God in pleading promises. If you were to go to one of the banks in Lombard Street, and see a man go in and out and lay a piece of paper on the table, and take it up again and nothing more; if he did that several times a day, I think there would soon be orders issued to the porter to keep the man out, because he was merely wasting the clerk's time, and doing nothing to purpose. Those city men who come to the bank in earnest present their cheques, they wait till they receive their gold and then they go, but not without having transacted real business. They do not put the paper down, speak about the excellent signature and discuss the correctness of the document, but they want their money for it, and they are not content without it. These are the people who are always welcome at the bank and not the triflers. Alas, a great many people play at praying, it is nothing better. I say they play at praying, they do not expect God to give them an answer, and thus they are mere triflers, who mock the Lord. He who prays in a business-like way, meaning what he says, honours the Lord. The Lord does not play at promising, Jesus did not sport at confirming the word by his blood, and we must not make a jest of prayer by going about it in a listless unexpecting spirit.

The Holy Spirit is in earnest, and we must be in earnest also. We must go for a blessing, and not be satisfied till we have it; like the hunter, who is not satisfied because he has run so many miles, but is never content till he takes his prey.

Faith, moreover, pleads the performances of God, she looks back on the past and says, "Lord, thou didst deliver me on such and such an occasion; wilt thou fail me now." She, moreover, takes her life as a whole, and pleads thus:—

"After so much mercy past,
Wilt thou let me sink at last?"

"Hast thou brought me so far that I may be put to shame at the end?" She knows how to bring the ancient mercies of God, and make them arguments for present favours. But your time would all be gone if I tried to exhibit, even a thousandth part of faith's pleas.

Sometimes, however, faith's pleas are very singular. As in this text, it is by no means according to the proud rule of human nature to plead—"I am poor and needy, make haste unto me, O God." It is like another prayer of David: "Have mercy upon mine iniquity, for it is great." It is not the manner of men to plead so, they say, "Lord, have mercy on me, for I am not so bad a sinner as some." But faith reads things in a truer light, and bases her pleas on truth. "Lord, because my sin is great, and thou art a great God, let thy great mercy be magnified in me." You know the story of the Syrophenician woman; that is a grand instance of the ingenuity of faith's reasoning. She came

to Christ about her daughter, and he answered her not a word. What do you think her heart said? Why, she said in herself, "It is well, for he has not denied me: since he has not spoken at all, he has not refused me." With this for an encouragement, she began to plead again. Presently Christ spoke to her sharply, and then her brave heart said, "I have gained words from him at last, I shall have deeds from him by-and-by." That also cheered her; and then, when he called her a dog. "Ah," she reasoned, "but a dog is a part of the family, it has some connection with the master of the house. Though it does not eat meat from the table, it gets the crumbs under it, and so I have thee now, great Master, dog as I am; the great mercy that I ask of thee, great as it is to me, is only a crumb to thee; grant it then I beseech thee." Could she fail to have her request? Impossible! When faith hath a will, she always finds a way, and she will win the day when all things forebode defeat.

Faith's pleas are singular, but, let me add, faith's pleas are always sound; for after all, it is a very telling plea to urge that we are poor and needy. Is not that the main argument with mercy? Necessity is the very best plea with benevolence, either human or divine. Is not our need the best reason we can urge? If we would have a physician come quickly to a sick man, "Sir," we say, "it is no common case, he is on the point of death, come to him, come quickly!" If we wanted our city firemen to rush to a fire, we should not say to them, "Make haste, for it is only a small fire;" but, on the contrary, we urge that it is an old house, full of combustible materials, and there are rumours of petroleum and gunpowder on the premises; besides, it is near a timber yard, hosts of wooden cottages are close by, and before long we shall have half the city in a blaze." We put the case as badly as we can. Oh for wisdom to be equally wise in pleading with God, to find arguments everywhere, but especially to find them in our necessities.

They said two centuries ago that the trade of beggary was the easiest one to carry on, but it paid the worst. I am not sure about the last at this time, but certainly the trade of begging with God is a hard one, and undoubtedly it pays the best of anything in the world. It is very noteworthy that beggars with men have usually plenty of pleas on hand. When a man is hardly driven and starving, he can usually find a reason why he should ask aid of every likely person. Suppose it is a person to whom he is already under many obligations, then the poor creature argues, "I may safely ask of him again, for he knows me, and has been always very kind." If he never asked of the person before, then he says, "I have never worried him before; he cannot say he has already done all he can for me; I will make bold to begin with him." If it is one of his own kin, then he will say, "Surely you will help me in my distress, for you are a relation;" and if it be a stranger, he says, "I have often found strangers kinder than my own blood, help me, I entreat you." If he asks of the rich, he pleads that they will never miss what they give; and if he begs of the poor, he urges that they know what want means, and he is sure they will sympathise with him in his great distress. Oh that we were half as much on the alert to fill our mouths with arguments when we are before the Lord. How is it that we are not half awake, and do not seem to have our spiritual senses aroused. May God grant that we may learn the art of pleading with the eternal God, for in that shall rest our prevalence with him, through the merit of Jesus Christ.

III. I must be brief on the next point. It is A SOUL URGENT: "Make haste unto me, O God. O Lord, make no tarrying." We may well be urgent with God, if as yet we are not saved, for our need is urgent; we are in constant peril, and the peril is of the most tremendous kind. O sinner, within an hour, within a minute, thou mayest be where hope can never visit thee; therefore, cry, "Make haste, O God, to deliver me: make haste to help me, O Lord!" Yours is not a case that can bear lingering: you have not time to procrastinate; therefore, be urgent, for your need is so. And, remember, if you really are under a sense of need, and the Spirit of God is at work with you, you will and must be urgent. An ordinary sinner may be content to wait, but a quickened sinner wants

mercy now. A dead sinner will lie quiet, but a living sinner cannot rest till pardon is sealed home to his soul. If you are urgent this morning, I am glad of it, because your urgency, I trust, arises from the possession of spiritual life. When you cannot live longer without a Saviour, the Saviour will come to you, and you shall rejoice in him.

Brethren, members of this church, as I have said on another point, the same truth holds good with you. God will come to bless you, and come speedily, when your sense of need becomes deep and urgent. Oh, how great is this church's need! We shall grow cold, unholy, and worldly; there will be no conversions, there will be no additions to our numbers; there will be diminutions, there will be divisions, there will be mischief of all kinds; Satan will rejoice, and Christ will be dishonoured, unless we obtain a larger measure of the Holy Spirit. Our need is urgent, and when we feel that need thoroughly, then we shall get the blessing which we want. Does any melancholy spirit say, "We are in so bad a state that we cannot expect a large blessing?" I reply, perhaps if we were worse, we should obtain it all the sooner. I do not mean if we were really so, but if we felt we were worse, we should be nearer the blessing. When we mourn that we are in an ill state, then we cry the more vehemently to God, and the blessing comes. God never refused to go with Gideon because he had not enough valiant men with him; but he paused because the people were too many. He brought them down from thousands to hundreds, and he diminished the hundreds before he gave them victory. When you feel that you must have God's presence, but that you do not deserve it, and when your consciousness of this lays you in the dust, then shall the blessing be vouchsafed.

For my part, brethren and sisters, I desire to feel a spirit of urgency within my soul as I plead with God for the dew of his grace to descend upon this church. I am not bashful in this matter, for I have a license to pray. Mendicancy is forbidden in the streets, but, before the Lord I am a licensed beggar. Jesus has said, "men ought always to pray and not to faint." You land on the shores of a foreign country with the greatest confidence when you carry a passport with you, and God has issued passports to his children, by which they come boldly to his mercy seat; he has invited you, he has encouraged you, he has bidden you come to him, and he has promised that whatsoever ye ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive. Come, then, come urgently, come importunately, come with this plea, "I am poor and needy; make no tarrying, O my God," and a blessing shall purely come; it will not tarry. God grant we may see it, and give him the glory of it.

IV. I am sorry to have been so brief where I had need to have enlarged, but I must close with the fourth point. Here is another part of the art and mystery of prayer—THE SOUL GRASPING GOD. She has pleaded, and she has been urgent, but now she comes to close quarters; she grasps the covenant angel with one hand, "Thou art my help," and with the other, "Thou art my deliverer." Oh, those blessed "my's," those potent "my's." The sweetness of the Bible lies in the possessive pronouns, and he who is taught to use them as the psalmist did, shall come off a conqueror with the eternal God. Now sinner, I pray God thou mayest be helped to say this morning to the blessed Christ of God, "Thou art my help and my deliverer." Perhaps you mourn that you cannot get that length, but, poor soul, hast thou any other help? If thou hast, then thou canst not hold two helpers with the same hand. "Oh, no," say you, "I have no help anywhere. I have no hope except in Christ." Well, then, poor soul, since thy hand is empty, that empty hand was made on purpose to grasp thy Lord with: lay hold on him! Say to him, this day, "Lord, I will hang on thee as poor lame Jacob did; now I cannot help myself, I will cleave to thee: I will not let thee go except thou bless me." "Ah, it would be too bold," says one. But the Lord loves holy boldness in poor sinners; he would have you be bolder than you think of being. It is an unhallowed bashfulness that dares not trust a crucified Saviour. He died on purpose to save such as thou art; let him have his way with thee, and do thou trust him. "Oh," saith one, "but I am so unworthy." He came to seek and save the unworthy.

He is not the Saviour of the self-righteous: he is the sinners' Saviour—"friend of sinners" is his name. Unworthy one, lay hold on him! "Oh," saith one, "but I have no right." Well, but that is the very reason you should grasp him, for right is for the court of justice, not for the hall of mercy. I would advise thee not to try thy rights, for thou hast no right but to be condemned; but thou needest no rights when dealing with Jesus. Nothing makes a charitable person refuse his alms like a beggar's saying, "I have a right." "Nay," says the giver, "If you have rights, go and get them; I will give you nothing." Since you have no right, your need shall be your claim: it is all the claim you want. Methinks I hear one say, "It is too late for me to plead for grace." It cannot be: it is impossible. While you live and desire mercy, it is not too late to seek it. Notice the parable of the man who wanted three loaves. I will tell you what crossed my mind when I read it: the man went to his friend at midnight; it was late, was it not? Why, his friend might have said, and, indeed, did in effect say to him, that it was too late, but yet the pleader gained the bread after all. In the parable the time was late, it could not have been later; for if it had been a little later than midnight, it would have been early in the next morning, and so not late at all. It was midnight, and it could not be later; and so, if it is downright midnight with your soul, yet, be of good cheer, Jesus is an out of season Saviour; many of his servants are "born out of due time." Any season is the right season to call upon the name of Jesus; therefore, only do not let the devil tempt thee with the thought that it can be too late. Go to Jesus now, go at once, and lay hold on the horns of the altar by a venturesome faith, and say, "Sacrifice for sinners, thou art a sacrifice for me. Intercessor for the graceless, thou art an intercessor for me. Thou who distributest gifts to the rebellious, distribute gifts to me, for a rebel I have been. When we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. Such am I, good Master; let the power of thy death be seen in me to Save my soul."

Oh, you that are saved and, therefore, love Christ, I want you, dear brethren, as the saints of God, to practice this last part of my subject; and be sure to lay hold upon God in prayer. "Thou art my help and my deliverer." As a church we throw ourselves upon the strength of God, and we can do nothing without him; but we do not mean to be without him, we will hold him fast. "Thou art my help and my deliverer." There was a boy at Athens, according to the old story, who used to boast that he ruled all Athens, and when they asked him how, he said, "Why, I rule my mother, my mother rules my father, and my father rules the city." He who knows how to be master of prayer will rule the heart of Christ, and Christ can and will do all things for his people, for the Father hath committed all things into his hands. You can be omnipotent if you know how to pray, omnipotent in all things which glorify God. What doth the Word itself say? "Let him lay hold on my strength." Prayer moves the arm that moves the world. Oh for grace to grasp Almighty love in this fashion. We want more holdfast prayer; more tugging, and gripping, and wrestling prayer, that saith, "I will not let thee go." That picture of Jacob at Jabbok shall suffice for us to close with. The covenant angel is there, and Jacob wants a blessing from him: he seems to put him off, but no put-offs will do for Jacob. Then the angel endeavours to escape from him, and tugs and strives: so he may, but no efforts shall make Jacob relax his grasp. At last the angel falls from ordinary wrestling to wounding him in the very seat of his strength; and Jacob will let his thigh go, and all his limbs go, but he will not let the angel go. The poor man's strength shrivels under the withering touch, but in his weakness he is still strong: he throws his arms about the mysterious man, and holds him as in a death-grip. Then the other says, "Let me go, for the day breaketh." Mark, he did not shake him off, he only said, "Let me go;" the angel will do nothing to force him to relax his hold, he leaves that to his voluntary will. The valiant Jacob cries, "No, I am set on it, I am resolved to win an answer to my prayer. I will not let thee go except thou bless me." Now, when the church begins to pray, it may be at first, the Lord will make as though he would have gone further, and we may

fear that no answer will be given. Hold on, dear brethren. Be ye steadfast, unmoveable, notwithstanding all. By-and-by, it may be, there will come discouragements where we looked for a flowing success; we shall find brethren hindering, some will be slumbering, and others sinning; backsliders and impenitent souls will abound; but let us not be turned aside. Let us be all the more eager. And if it should so happen that we ourselves become distressed and dispirited, and feel we never were so weak as we are now; never mind, brethren, still hold on, for when the sinew is shrunk the victory is near. Grasp with a tighter clutch than ever. Be this our resolution, "I will not let thee go except thou bless me." Remember the longer the blessing is coming the richer it will be when it arrives. That which is gained speedily by a single prayer is sometimes only a second rate blessing; but that which is gained after many a desperate tug, and many an awful struggle, is a full weighted and precious blessing. The children of importunity are always fair to look upon. The blessing which costs us the most prayer will be worth the most. Only let us be persevering in supplication, and we shall gain a broad far-reaching benediction for ourselves, the churches, and the world. I wish it were in my power to stir you all to fervent prayer; but I must leave it with the great author of all true supplication, namely, the Holy Spirit. May he work in us mightily, for Jesus' sake. Amen.