

Lenten Testimonies.

REV. ARTHUR HANSER, Brooklyn, N. Y.

(Concluded.)

4. Does God Answer Prayer?

The answer is both Yes and No. The question is, What do we understand by prayer? God hears every prayer which is offered in the name of Jesus, offered in dependence upon the merit of Jesus Christ.

A man was once condemned to die for treason. He asked for the privilege to make one last appeal to the king, but it was denied. One day the king's son was playing where the condemned man was kept under guard. Suddenly snatching up the boy, he ran by the guard to the palace and gained admission to the king, none of the soldiers daring to stop him for fear of injuring the king's son. This man gained an audience and his pardon on account of the king's son. We all, when praying, must bring with us the King's Son, the Only-begotten of the Father, and it is for His sake, and His only, that we may bring a petition before the Father and are heard. All prayers that are not offered in the name of Jesus and

9) G. D. Bernheim, *History of the German Settlements and of the Lutheran Church in North and South Carolina*, p. 555 f.

in true faith in Him are just so many words spoken into the air. They never reach the Father's ear.

Scriptural assurances that God answers prayer are innumerable. "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you." Matt. 7, 7. "Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver thee." Ps. 50, 15. Indeed, God assures us: "Before they call, I will answer; while they are yet speaking, I will hear." Is. 65, 24. Yes, God attributes our lack of what we need to the simple fact that we have not prayed for it. "Ye have not because ye ask not." Jas. 4, 2.

And these promises are general. God hears every prayer, no matter what we pray for. No prayer goes without a blessing. Prayers for material as well as for spiritual blessings are answered.

There is no question about this with reference to spiritual blessings. Indeed, God only waits for us to ask. He is more willing to give than we are to receive them. "If, then, ye, being evil, can give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give His Holy Spirit to them that ask Him!" The prayer: "Lord, I believe, help Thou mine unbelief," is answered at once with an abundant increase of faith. "Teach us to pray," is answered at once with: "When ye pray, pray thus: Our Father, who art in heaven," etc. The penitent thief's prayer: "Lord, remember me when Thou comest into Thy kingdom," is answered at once with: "Verily, I say unto thee, To-day shalt thou be with Me in Paradise." Prayers for holiness, for peace, for forgiveness, for salvation are always answered.

But our prayers for temporal blessings are likewise answered. Indeed, most of God's assurances that He will answer prayer have reference to earthly things. "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you," etc.

Of course, God does not answer all prayers *alike*.

1. Sometimes God answers our prayers by giving us just what we want and when we want it. When Hezekiah was sick, and the prophet was sent to him and told him to put his house in order, "for thou shalt die and not live," Hezekiah turned his face to the wall and prayed to God to spare his life. And God heard his prayer and added fifteen years to his life.

When Abraham prayed for Sodom, God heard him in all that he asked. In fact, it was Abraham who wearied of asking before God wearied of answering him.

2. Sometimes God delays His answer. Abraham prayed for a son, but Isaac was born in Abraham's old age. Martha and Mary sent to Jesus with the prayer, "Master, he whom Thou lovest is sick." When, therefore, Jesus heard that Lazarus was sick, He abode two days in the same place where He was, delaying His arrival in Bethany four days.

Therefore, we are admonished to continue instant in prayer; to pray and to faint not; not to cast away our confidence. The Syrophenician woman, too, would not be discouraged, and continued to cry after Jesus, and finally fell down before Him and stopped Him; — and received the desired blessings.

3. Sometimes God answers our prayers in such unexpected ways that we scarcely recognize the answer when it comes. Paul prayed to God for the privilege of preaching the Gospel in Rome. God heard his prayer, and after years Paul got to Rome, but — as a prisoner. Little had he expected, when he prayed, that the answer would come in that way.

James and John asked the Lord for the privilege to sit, the one at His right hand and the other at His left, in glory. Jesus answered that prayer, but again in an unexpected way. James ascended to the throne on the fiery chariot of martyrdom and John by the slow stages of a long life of toil and service and suffering. They learned that the highest places are not given by favoritism, but by fitness. Those for whom it is prepared are those who are prepared for it. But the preparation consists in being made "conformable to His death."

A mother prays for her child's salvation. The child dies. Not long ago a mother said to me at the funeral of her child: "Pastor, I prayed every night that God would by all means save my child. I see now how He has answered my prayer. I never expected it that way." The children whom God takes into His safe-keeping cannot be lost any more.

4. Sometimes God answers our prayers by giving us something better than we ask. Thank God that He does not always give us what we want. So often we ask foolishly. Your boy asks you for a match or a knife, but you refuse to give it to him. Your refusal is prompted by your better knowledge and love. You know he would do serious damage in the house and to himself.

Our spiritual and eternal welfare is paramount. God's purpose in our life is not that we shall by all means enjoy these few years on earth, but that we shall in this time and life save our souls

through faith in Jesus Christ. Everything in life is made subservient to this end. If our prayers tend to our spiritual welfare, they are answered according to our will and wish. If we ask for bread, He will not give us a stone. Indeed, God will not give us a stone even if we ask for it.

God's refusal is prompted by love. Do not think that God refuses to give you what you ask just simply to show His authority, or because He is indifferent to your happiness, or because, back in eternity, all your life and circumstances have been unalterably fixed. God refuses only when your prayer would be harmful to your soul; because He loves you. "Now *Jesus loved* Martha and her sister, and Lazarus. When He had heard, therefore, that he was sick, He abode two days still in the same place where He was." John 11, 5. 6.

Now it seems to me I can read the thoughts of some of you and you are thinking to yourself: "Ah, he started fine. He said God hears every prayer. Now he qualifies and says He does not answer all prayers. After all, then, there is no use in praying. You have no assurance of getting what you ask and want." My friend, do you really mean to say that you want God to answer all your prayers just as you ask, and give you always just what you want, even when you pray foolishly? Do you really want to sell your birthright for a mess of pottage? Do you really want to stand before God and say to Him: "O God, give me what I want, no matter what the result will be. I want to enjoy these few years of life; I want my heart's wish, even if I must be damned forever"?

As for me, I want God in His wisdom and love to overrule my prayers; when I ask foolishly, I pray that God would answer according to His wisdom, and if my prayer will not minister to my salvation, that He would withhold what I desire and give me what is better. I would pray no more for any special gift if I were not certain that God's love and wisdom will overrule my foolishness when I pray ignorantly. Whether I have driven in a machine or walked about; whether I have lived in a palace or in a cottage, will be all the same — in a few years; whether I have walked hand in hand with my loved ones a few years more or less in this life will make no difference — in a few years; if only I shall meet them yonder, where there will be no more parting at all forever.

What blessed security this gives to us and what joy in prayer! If I leave to God to determine how He shall answer my prayer, then I do know that if the Lord gives me what I ask, it must be

good for me; otherwise He would not give it to me. If He withholds the blessing I ask, I will continue to pray with the confident assurance that He will give it to me by and by if I faint not; and if He will not give me what I ask, then surely He will give me something better.

Therefore, my friends, let us pray. Pray without ceasing. Let us not be discouraged by delays. Be not afraid to ask ignorantly. Turn all your wishes into prayers. If a wish is not fit to be prayed about, it is not fit to be cherished. Cast all your care upon Him. If a care is too small to be prayed about, it is too small to be made a burden. Pray, and be assured that you will never leave the throne of God without a blessing; a blessing as good as you ask and, if not, then better.

5. The Hour Is Come.

In the infancy of our race our first parents lived in the Garden of Eden, in innocence and happiness enjoying fellowship and communion with God. But they disobeyed and ate of the fruit of that forbidden tree and so brought death into the world and all our woe. Everything was lost — innocence, happiness, hope.

But God came to the rescue and, summoning Adam and Eve and the serpent, said to Satan: "I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her Seed. It shall bruise thy head, and thou shall bruise His heel." Gen. 3, 15.

Then Adam and Eve were driven forth out of their paradise with nothing to cheer them on their pilgrimage over the sin-cursed earth but this precious promise, that some time the Seed of the Woman, the Savior, should come, who would bring them back and restore to them their paradise lost.

However, Adam and Eve died, and their children died, and one generation after another came and went, and kingdoms and empires arose and passed away; 4,000 years elapsed, and then, at length, the hour was come, the Seed of the Woman, the Lord Jesus Christ, the Champion of the human race, came to meet the seed of the serpent in deadly combat, the issue of which was in no way uncertain. He would bruise our Champion's heel and lay Him into the dust of death; but our Champion was to rise in triumph out of the tomb and crush the serpent's head and emancipate the human race.

During all these 4,000 years kings and prophets had repeated the original promise of redemption. They all had waited to see

the day, but they saw it not. Again and again men said: "Lo here, Lo there." But their hopes were disappointed. At last John came and preached repentance, and men said: "This is He that should come." But John denied and said: "I am not that Prophet." Some turned to Jesus with the same hope, but the leaders rejected Him as not being the Promised One and condemned Him. And so when the hopes of the people burned low, and despair was giving way to indifference, as a thief in the night the hour was come, and the Savior was there, and He was none other than Jesus Christ, the Stone rejected by the builders which was to be the Corner-stone.

The hour was opportune. Everywhere in the homes of the people preparations were being made for the Passover. In the Temple, too, in Jerusalem, the priests were making ready for the sacrifice as they had for 1500 years. But now God's hour had come, and outside of Jerusalem on a little hill called Golgotha from the heights of which one could look down into the city and into the very courtyard of the Temple and see the priests hurrying to and fro;—out there God Himself was preparing to sacrifice His chosen Lamb, His only Son, whose blood should atone for the sins of the people, and not for their sins only, but for the sins of the whole world.

This hour did not overtake Jesus unexpectedly. A famous picture shows the little lad Jesus in Nazareth, with His arms outstretched in a playful attitude. The sun is sinking behind the western hills, and its last rays cast the shadow of the lad in the distinct form of a cross on the cottage in front of which He stood. The mother is represented somewhat apart, viewing with horror the evil omen which that cross cast over the life of her boy.

The picture is true to fact; but it would be more true still if the cross were shown as falling in front of the lad, His eyes resting upon it. For it is a fact that the cross cast its shadows over the whole pathway of Christ's life, and He recognized it with gradually increasing clearness of vision. Our Isaac was under no illusion as to who the Lamb would be, and, knowing it, He willingly carried the wood and climbed the hill ready to be offered up when the hour was come.

True, "the hour" was His whole lifetime. Plaintively He said: "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man hath not where to lay His head." "He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief." Men hid as it were their faces from Him. But "the

hour," the supreme hour, was come when on the cross He shed His blood and died, and thus expiated the sins of the world. "Without shedding of blood there is no remission," says the Bible. "The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth us from all sin."

There is a fountain filled with blood
 Drawn from Immanuel's veins,
 And sinners plunged beneath that flood
 Lose all their guilty stains.

And now God offers to forgive your sins upon that one condition, that you disclaim all personal merit and accept God's gift and grace on the sole ground of Christ's supreme sacrifice. This is the only way of salvation for the best. Do not put your trust partly in what Christ has done and suffered for you and partly in what you can do yourself. It is Christ only — or not at all. You cannot cross an abyss on one good and one rotten board. When you step with one foot and lean your weight on the solid board of Christ and His sacrifice, your weight is sustained. But when you take the next step and lean the weight of your sin and need on the rotten plank, you are sure to go down and plunge to destruction. Trust in the Lord Jesus as your Savior and in Him only. Be willing to be saved like the worst. There is no other way. No man cometh to the Father but by Christ.

And there is hope in Christ for the worst. A story is told that Satan once appeared to a sinner in despair over his sin. The devil showed him a long scroll on top of which was written *all sin*, and below there followed the list of the man's sins; sins in thought, in word, in deed; sins of omission, sins of commission; sins that he had long forgotten, sins that he had never known; sins that had burned their memory into his very soul. As the sinner read and read and read, despair gripped him, and, intending to destroy the record of his sin, he snatched the scroll out of the devil's hands, and, behold, on the top of the page, which the devil had hidden with his hand, the sinner read: "The blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, cleanseth us from *all sin*."

My friends, I have repeated this Gospel-message to you each day of this week. I do not know how often you have heard this invitation to put your trust in Jesus to be saved, but the hour will come when you will hear this invitation and offer of God for the last time, when your decision or your lack of a decision will color all your eternity to its own hue. Perhaps now the hour is come. Let me plead with you! Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ now and be saved! Amen.