

## **PRAYER, AND ITS ANSWER**

Preached on Thursday Evening, June 10th, 1841, at Zoar Chapel, Great Alie Street, London

"He shall call upon Me, and I will answer him." Psalm 91:15

It is thought by some to be a great mark of spirituality of mind, and a strong evidence of great attainments in the divine life, to see Christ in every part of Scripture—especially in the Psalms of David. Now there can be no doubt that Christ is sweetly set forth in the Psalms, for we read that He Himself spoke to His disciples of what was "written in the law of Moses and in the prophets and in the Psalms concerning Him." Nor can there be any doubt that much of the Psalms is taken up with descriptions of Him—that His experience is very largely set forth in the Psalms, and that His glory and His grace are powerfully manifested therein. But it is a very doubtful point to me, whether it is a decisive evidence of great spirituality, and an undeniable proof of divine teaching, to be able to see Him in the Psalms. For it comes to this question: whence is this sight derived? Is it not possible to see Him with the eye of speculation, or with the eye of imagination? Is it not possible to see Him with the eyes of other men? Is it not possible to be borne on the wings of fancy; and merely in a way of judgment, in a way of doctrinal speculation, in a way of mere exercise of our intellectual faculties, in a way of mere nature and the flesh—is it not possible, aye, is it not a common occurrence, thus to be able to see Christ in this passage and in that, quite independent of any divine unction, whereby the eyes are anointed, quite independent of any sweet manifestation of Christ to the soul by the Holy Ghost, and quite independent of any spiritual, humbling views of Him, as set forth in the Scriptures—is not this possible? Aye, is it not a common occurrence? And,

therefore, before we can positively and decisively say that to see Christ in the Scriptures is a mark of spirituality of mind, a decisive proof of great attainments in the divine life, we must ask and answer these questions—Whence does this sight come? What feelings does this sight produce? Who gave us these eyes, and whence is it that we have derived these views?

Now, I believe that if the soul is blessedly bedewed with the unction of the Holy Ghost, and in "simplicity and godly sincerity," with a feeling heart, with brokenness, contrition, tenderness, and humility, is led by the Holy Ghost into the Psalms, as setting forth Christ's sufferings, or Christ's experience, or Christ's grace, or Christ's glory, and feels a sweet melting down under that sight, and viewing Christ there set forth is led into any measure of spiritual communion with Him, so as to have some divine acquaintance and some heavenly fellowship with Him, then we have reason to believe that to see Christ in the Psalms and to feel Christ in the Psalms, is of God. But if it is merely an exercise of fancy, merely a sharpening of one's wits, merely a seeing Him with a kind of doctrinal speculation, leading to no fruits within and to no communion with Him as there set forth, but merely floating as a bare speculation in the mind, then of a certainty we may say that it is very possible to have great and enlightened views of Christ as set forth in the Psalms and other parts of Scripture, and yet not to have received them with power from God Himself.

Now Satan can make use of truth in the Church of God to introduce his own errors, and often makes use of one truth to subvert another truth. Satan is a cunning artificer—he uses no rotten levers when he wants to overthrow a building; but he will select the strongest and longest and most powerful he can possibly wield. And I have been astonished sometimes to

see how Satan, that crafty magician, that wonderful mechanic, can make use of the lever of one truth to overthrow another truth; how he can bring forward doctrine to upset experience, how he can use doctrine to upset practice, and how he can employ one part of God's Word to upset another part of God's Word. That he does so use truth is most clear. This very psalm gives us a certain instance of it. When he would fain that the Lord should cast Himself down from a pinnacle of the temple, he brings forward a passage from this psalm as his warrant—he makes use of the very truth of God as a lever whereby to throw down the Son of God; for he says, quoting Scripture, "If Thou be the Son of God, cast Thyself down; for it is written, He shall give His angels charge concerning Thee, and in their hands they shall bear Thee up, lest at any time Thou dash Thy foot against a stone." Here was Satan making use of a most certain truth, to introduce (if he could do so) presumption into the mind of the blessed Saviour; employing Scripture to lead the blessed Mediator into an act of daring presumption.

But the point to which I was alluding is this—It is most certain that Christ is much spoken of in the Psalms. Now this, which is a certain truth, has got a footing in the Church of God; it has been set forth by able men, and heaven-taught men, and is received as truth in the judgments of many persons. And here comes the subtlety of this "old serpent." He says, "It is Christ in the Psalms." Any deep experience in the Psalms—it is *Christ's* experience. "Deep calleth unto deep at the noise of Thy water-spouts"—that is *Christ* speaking. "Mine iniquities have taken hold upon me, so that I am not able to look up"—that is the experience of *Christ*, when the sins of His elect family met upon His head. "Deliver me from blood-guiltiness, O God"—that is the experience of *Christ*, when He was suffering under the weight of sin imputed to Him. Now, no doubt there is the experience of Christ thus set

forth in the Psalms; but what is the object of this device of Satan? It is by setting forth all this experience as belonging to Christ, secretly to cast out the experience as belonging to God's people; it is by putting it all upon Christ, and saying that the Psalms are full of the experience of Christ, not to exalt Christ, but to cast down experience. The professed object is to glorify the Son of God, and to set forth His sufferings; the secret object is to cast out this experience as a needful thing to be undergone in the souls of God's people, and to blunt the edge of conviction in men's consciences. When they read, for instance, in the Psalms of a certain deep experience that the Psalmist passed through, as "My wounds stink and are corrupt because of my foolishness"—conscience says, "Did *your* wounds ever stink, and were they ever corrupt because of your foolishness?" "No." "Oh!" says judgment, "but that is *Christ*." So—"Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow." "Was that ever your prayer?" says conscience—"Was that ever your experience?" asks the inward monitor. "No." "But," says judgment, "that is all *Christ*." And so, by setting forth the experience in the Psalms as belonging to Christ, there is a secret blunting the edge of conviction in men's consciences, and a casting out the experience of the saints as traced out in the Word of God. And so we see what a crafty, subtle serpent this is—to come with such truths, with great and glorious views of the Son of God, and to make use of them as a lever to overthrow the experience of God's saints as there traced out.

Now I believe, as to the Psalms, as written by the Spirit of God, we have three grand interpretations of them—in other words, we have three grand outlines of heavenly teaching. We have, first, the experience of the Psalmist himself. When he said, "My wounds stink and are corrupt because of my foolishness," it was the wounds of the Psalmist that stunk

because of his foolishness; it was a personal matter, which was personally felt; it was an inward, individual experience, which was inwardly, individually known; he described with his pen what he felt in his heart—that "*his* wounds stunk and were corrupt because of *his* foolishness." But there is another experience, which is the experience of Christ under the hidings of His Father's countenance—the experience of the Lord Jesus when, in our nature, He bare our "sins in His own body on the tree," and groaned forth the agonies of His soul under the sensations of divine wrath which were manifested in His conscience; that is another great branch of experience set forth in the Psalms. And then there is a third, which is the experience of God's saints now, the experience which the Holy Ghost works in the hearts of God's people, which tallies and accurately agrees with the experience of the Psalmist, whoever he was—sometimes David, sometimes Asaph, sometimes Ethan, sometimes Heman—and accurately tallies also in its measure with the experience of Christ there set forth. And thus we see what a wonderful book the Scriptures are; that "they are not," as Peter says, "of any private interpretation," to be limited to one interpretation, to be confined to one individual; but they are of public interpretation, of a public nature, and common to the whole Church of God, as the Spirit of truth leads the people of God into all truth. Now, if we look at this psalm, we have the strongest evidence that it speaks of Jesus. We know that it was quoted by Satan to the Lord of life and glory; and had it not referred to Him, Satan would have needed no other refutation.

This psalm, like some other psalms, seems to be in the form of a dialogue; there appear to be two speakers introduced. The Lord begins: "He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty." This seems to be a sentence that comes from the mouth of

Jehovah; it was a testimony, a word dropped into the soul of the Psalmist from the mouth of God. The soul of the Psalmist responds; there is an heavenly echo in his bosom to the voice that came from the mouth of God; sweet hope and blessed confidence are raised up by the application of these words to his heart, and he breaks forth—"I will say of the Lord, He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in Him will I trust." And now the Lord takes up the sentence, and goes on to the end of the psalm: "Surely He shall deliver thee from the snare of the fowler, and from the noisome pestilence; He shall cover thee with His feathers, and under His wings shalt thou trust; His truth shall be thy shield and buckler," and so on. And if you bear this in mind, that very often in the Psalms there are what we may call dialogues between two persons—the Lord speaking inwardly to the Psalmist's soul, and the Psalmist speaking to the Lord—if we bear in mind that many of these are heavenly dialogues, sweet and blessed colloquies, it will explain to us why the person is so often changed.

Now, with respect to the words of the text, we find a promise given in them, or rather a *declaration* which is sealed with a *promise*—"He shall call upon Me, and I will answer him."

But who is "*he*?" Unless we can settle who "*he*" is, we shall be all abroad; we shall not be able to understand what the declaration is, or to whom the promise is made. And therefore, before we can get into the text, we must endeavour to ascertain who the person is to whom the declaration is made, and in whose heart the promise is sealed.

This "*he*" must be the same person who is spoken of throughout the whole psalm; and therefore the first verse will afford us a clue to the point. Generally speaking, through the

Psalms and other parts of Scripture, there are clues, there are keys; and if we can only get the key in our hand, it will fit the wards of the lock—it will open up the psalm. And therefore my chief desire in reading a psalm for my own instruction and comfort, or in preaching from it, is to find out the key. If I can discover the clue, it seems to introduce me into the chambers; if I can get hold of the key, it seems to open the recesses, and lay bare the treasures of heavenly truth contained in them.

Then "he" that shall call upon the Lord is the same person that is spoken of in the first verse of this psalm. And this is said of him: "He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty." Then every promise that is made in this psalm, and every declaration that is given in this psalm to a certain person, applies to that certain person spoken of in the first verse—the character described by these words, "He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High." Then no man has any right to a single part of this psalm, no man has any interest in a single promise given in this psalm, no man has any divine acquaintance with the blessed mysteries couched in this psalm, whose name is not written in the first verse—whose experience is not such as the Holy Ghost has there traced out.

And who is this man, and what is his experience? It is "he that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High." What is "the secret place of the Most High?" It is the same spot of which Asaph speaks in the seventy-third psalm—"Until I went into the sanctuary of God; then understood I their end." It is the spot of which the Lord speaks in Ezekiel—"I will be to them as a little sanctuary in all the countries where they shall come." Then this "secret place" is the secret bosom of God. It is an entrance by faith into Jehovah, who by a spiritual

manifestation of Himself leads the soul into a spiritual acquaintance with Him. "The secret place of the Most High" is that solemn spot where Jehovah meets with the sinner in Christ, and where He opens up to him the riches of His mercy, and leads him into His bosom so as to read the secrets of His loving heart. It is called a "secret place," as corresponding with those words, "The secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him, and He will show them His covenant." It is called a "secret place," as only known to the persons to whom it is specially communicated. It is called a "secret place," because none can get into it—no, nor desire to get into it—except the Lord Himself, with His own mysterious hand, opens up to them a way into it, sets them down in it, and sweetly blesses them in it. Then to be in "the secret place of the Most High" is to be brought into something like fellowship and acquaintance with God—something like communion, spiritual worship, divine intercourse; so as to know something of Him experimentally, and "run into" Him as "a strong tower," and there feel solemn safety. The "secret place of the Most High," then, is not to be got at by nature and by reason; flesh never entered there. "Flesh and blood" cannot enter the kingdom of God above; and flesh and blood cannot enter the kingdom of God below. "I thank Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth," said Jesus, "that Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes." Therefore, they are "hid from the wise and prudent." It is that "path which no fowl knoweth, and which the vulture's eye hath not seen." It is a secret hidden from all except those to whom God Himself is pleased by His Spirit specially to reveal it. And when He reveals it, He draws the soul by the powerful attractions of love, "with the cords of love, and the bands of a man," by mysterious attractions into that "secret place;" and then He begins to discover a little of those secrets which are stored up in the Son of God—a few of those secrets



which are with those who fear God—a few of those secrets the communication of which makes a man spiritually and eternally wise.

"He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High," is one who more or less, as the Spirit leads him into it, abides there. "Abide in Me, and I in you; if a man abide not in Me, he is cast forth as a branch and is withered." When a man once gets, therefore, by faith into "the secret place of the Most High," he "abides" in it; not as a matter of constant experience, not that he can always feel sweet communion with God; but still it is his home. We all have our home, our fireside, the place where at night we lay our weary bodies down to rest; and it is our dwelling-place. We are not always there; some of us leave our homes in the morning to go about our business, and come back to our homes at night; but our affections are there, our heart is there, our family is there, and we look for evening-time to go home and rest there. It is our dwelling-house, and yet we are not always in it. So with this "secret place of the Most High; "it is the dwelling-place of the Christian—it is the house, the home where his affections are, where his treasure is, and to which his heart turns—but still he is not always there. He goes in and out, he goes abroad, and often leaves this sweet home. Yet it is his dwelling-place; because it is there, and there alone, he can solidly rest; it is there, and there alone, he can lie down, and feed and take pleasure.

Here is a soul, then, that is brought by faith, under the Spirit's operation, to know "the secret place of the Most High:" that is, to have some spiritual acquaintance with God in Christ, to enter by faith into the secrets which Jehovah reveals, and to feel that the manifestation of those secrets to his soul makes his heaven here below, and constitutes the real rest and satisfaction of his heart. And to this character

all the promises in the Psalms are made; he is interested in every covenant promise that is there uttered by the mouth of God Himself; and every one of those covenant promises shall be fulfilled in him, and shall be fulfilled for him.

1. But the Lord has attached (I will not call it a condition, as it is a word I abhor)—the Lord has attached a *declaration*, which declaration is linked on with a promise. The Lord has appointed a certain path, wherein the soul is to walk. The walking in that path is a necessary step to obtain the blessing that lies at the end of the path. It is no condition to be performed by the creature; it is nothing that springs out of, or depends upon, human will or human merit; but it hangs upon the Lord's appointment. God has connected certain promises with certain appointments; he has connected certain deliverances with certain trials; he has connected certain blessings with certain states and positions of soul. Therefore, if we are to get at the blessing, we must get at it through God's appointment. If we are to reach the home, we must travel by that road which leads to it. Therefore, "what God hath joined together, let no man"—and no man ever can—"put asunder." Now the Lord has, in the text, declared a certain path; He has made a positive declaration; and to this positive appointment He has graciously annexed a certain promise: "He shall call upon Me, and I will answer him." Then the declaration is as certain as the promise; the one is as much of divine decree as the other; and he that walks not in the path will not have the promise which is connected with that path. In this sense, and in this sense only, can we understand the conditions of Scripture—the *ifs*, God having linked things together, which are both of His sovereign decree, which are both of His eternal appointment, and which the Spirit graciously brings His people into, and blessedly works in their hearts and consciences. Thus, it is no matter of free-will, it is no matter

of man's righteousness or man's wisdom, whether we shall "call upon God." It is appointed he should call upon Him. God has said in positive terms (and His "I will" and His "he shall" never can be broken)—"*he shall* call upon Me." It therefore does not rest with the creature whether he will call upon Him or not; it is not a matter poised in the balances of the creature, whether he shall pray or not. God has not left it to man, whether he shall take up prayer or lay aside prayer, but He has made it a part of His own sovereign appointments, of His own eternal decrees, which can no more be frustrated than salvation itself. Therefore, this soul that "dwells in the secret place of the Most High"—"he shall call upon God." It is not left to him, whether he will call or not; but it stands in the way of eternal decree, in a way of sovereign good pleasure. And, therefore, he must call upon God, because God has said that He shall.

But though this stands in the way of eternal decree, though this rests upon the basis of divine sovereignty, God does not work it in the soul in that manner. He does not come in a dry doctrinal way into a man's conscience, and say—"I have appointed thee to pray, and therefore pray thou must." He does not come with an abstract truth, which is written in a man's judgment, like a rule of arithmetic, for the man to set to work upon the abstract truth as a child at school sets to work upon a sum. The Lord does not work in that manner; but He works by raising up certain feelings, by communicating certain desires, by kindling certain wants, by bringing the soul into certain states, and by pouring out the Spirit of grace and of supplications upon it—all of which tend to that point, to which He is leading the soul, and all which spring out of God's sovereign and eternal appointment.

"He shall call upon Me." *When* shall he call? Why, when the Lord pours out "the Spirit of grace and of supplications,"

when the Lord lays wants upon his heart, when the Lord brings conviction into his conscience, when the Lord brings trouble into his soul, when the Lord draws forth that "Spirit of grace and of supplications" which He has poured out, when the Lord is graciously pleased to draw forth faith into blessed exercise, and to enable the soul to pour out its desires, and to offer up its fervent breathings at His feet, and to give them out as He gives them in. Then to call upon the Lord is no point of duty which is to be attended to as a duty; it is no point of legal constraint, which must be done because the Word of God speaks of it; but it is a feeling, an experience, an inward work, which springs from the Lord's hand, and which flows in the Lord's own divine channel. Thus when the Lord is pleased to pour out this "Spirit of grace and supplications," we must pray; but we do not pray *because* we must; we pray because we have no better occupation, we have no more earnest desire, we have no more powerful feeling, and we have no more invincible and irresistible constraint. The child of God in trouble *must* groan and sigh; he does not say, "Eight o'clock is come, twelve o'clock is come, six o'clock is come, now I will groan, now I will sigh a little, I will take out my Bible, and begin to groan, and to sigh;" that is nothing but the groan of the hypocrite, it is nothing but the sigh of the self-deceiving professor. The living child of God groans and sighs because it is the expression of his wants, because it is a language which pours forth the feelings of his heart, because groans and sighs are pressed out of him by the heavy weight upon him. A man lying in the street with a heavy weight upon him will call for help; he does not say, "It is *my duty* to cry to the passers-by for help;" he cries for help because he wants to be delivered. A man with a broken leg does not say, "It is *my duty* to send for a surgeon;" he wants him, to set the limb. And a man in a raging disease does not say, "It is *my duty* to send for a physician;" he *wants* him, to heal his disease. So, when God

the Holy Spirit works in a child of God, he prays, not out of a sense of duty, but out of a burdened heart. He prays, because he cannot but pray; he groans, because he must groan; he sighs, because he must sigh; having an inward weight, an inward burden, an inward experience, in which, and out of which, he is compelled to call upon the Lord. And I never think anything of a man's religion which did not begin in this way. If a man's religion (so-called) began in any other way than by the Lord's bringing him to know himself as a sinner before Him, and except those convictions of sin were accompanied by "the Spirit of grace and supplications," whereby he was enabled to pour out his soul into the bosom of God, and to sigh, and cry, and groan, "being burdened," I never can believe that man's religion began by God's internal teaching. I know mine began so; and I have always stood firm upon this foundation, that a religion that does not begin with the sighs, and groans, and pourings out of the soul to God under the pourings in of the Spirit, is a religion that began in the flesh, and never sprang from the mighty operation of God in the soul.

"He shall call upon Me." *What* shall he call upon God for? "He shall call upon Me" for everything that he wants internally to feel. A child of God can call for nothing else. He cannot direct his prayers according to the rule of another's: he does not pick up a few pretty expressions from a gifted man in the table-pew, and go with these prayers to God. He knows that he has to do with One that searches him through, that he stands before a God that will not be mocked and trifled with; and when he comes before the Lord, he asks Him, with sighs, and cries, and groans, for those blessings, and those blessings only, which his conscience tells him he wants, and which his soul is hungering and thirsting to enjoy, delivered into his heart from the mouth of God Himself. He calls upon God for the pardon of his sins, he calls upon God for the

revelation of Himself, he calls upon God for the manifestation of Christ, he calls upon God for the application of atoning blood, he calls upon God for the revelation of His eternal favour to His soul, he calls upon God sweetly to bring him into an experimental knowledge of the Lord of life and glory, he calls upon God for every blessing that is set before his eyes, and for every blessing that is laid upon his heart, after which he longs and groans and sighs and pants heartily with pantings and groanings unutterable.

II. Now the Lord says, "I will answer." "He shall call upon me, and I will answer him." I will answer just as much as he shall call; and he shall call just as much as I will answer." They are both linked together, and both stand on the same basis of sovereign appointment and eternal decree.

"I will answer him." *What* will He answer? Why, He will answer those prayers which He Himself has indited. He will answer those wants which He Himself has created. He will answer those hungerings which He Himself has produced. He will answer those thirstings which He Himself has, by His own blessed Spirit, wrought powerfully in the soul.

He does not say *when*; He does not say *how*. He does not say it shall be the next hour, next week, next month, next year. He leaves that with Himself, He keeps that in His own hands. He binds Himself by a naked promise; but He does not tell us how He will bring about that promise. That He keeps in His own bosom. And it is a mercy that He does, because, by keeping it in His own bosom, He leaves to Himself a wonderful way in which to work out the accomplishment of that promise. Keeping the manner and the time in His own breast, He reserves to Himself different paths, in which He leads His children, merely tying Himself down with a naked promise, and not revealing in what way

the promise shall be accomplished. It was so with Abraham; He gave him a naked promise, but the way in which it was to be accomplished He kept in His own breast. And so He has given a naked promise to every child of His that "calls upon Him." He says, "He shall call upon Me, and I will answer him;" He has tied Himself there, He has bound Himself by His word, which can never be broken, but He has not said *how*, nor has He said *when*.

Now it is this *how* and *when* that so try the child of God, who is calling upon the Lord, and not receiving the answer that he desires to receive at His mouth. If he could only but know the *time* fixed, he could bear with all his trouble patiently; if he could only see the *manner* in which the blessing would come, he thinks he should find some relief from his trial of soul in calling upon God and finding the answer so long delayed. But the answer that God gives, He gives in His own time. And I believe many of the children of God have had to cry to Him for days, and weeks, and months, and years, and the answer has been delayed; and then, when expectation seemed to give up the ghost, when there seemed no longer any prospect that God would fulfil His promise, when the hopes of nature (as in the case of Abraham) were become dead, then the Lord fulfilled His promise, and brought His answer into the soul.

But sometimes the Lord is pleased to answer our prayers more immediately; He brings us into those straits and troubles from which we cannot extricate ourselves, and then will answer our prayer, and fulfil the promise. But perhaps it is in such a way as we least expect, and yet in such a way as most glorifies Him.

Now there is sometimes in men's minds a kind of confusion in this matter. They are in a certain path, from which they

want to be extricated; they are under a trial, from which they want to be delivered; they call upon the Lord to deliver them, and they ask for some manifestation of Himself, some going forth of His hand, some application of His promise, some divine leading which they are to follow. But the Lord may be working in a very different way from what they think; and they may really be inattentive to the internal voice of God in their consciences, because they are expecting the voice to come in some other way. It was just so with myself. When I was in the Establishment, burdened with all the things I had to go through, and troubled and distressed in my mind, I was calling upon the Lord to deliver me, to lead me out, to show me what to do, to make the path plain and clear. Now that was my sincere cry; but I expected some miraculous interposition, to hear some voice, to have some wonderful leading; and in waiting for that I was waiting for what the Lord never meant to bestow. And I was brought at last to this internal conviction: suppose I were guilty of drunkenness, suppose I were living in adultery, suppose I were walking in known sin, should I want a voice from God to say to me, "Leave this drunkenness, come out from this adultery, give up this sin?" should I want some divine manifestation to bring me out of a sin, when my conscience bore its solemn witness against it, and I was condemned under the weight and burden of it? No, the very conviction is the answer of God to the prayer; the very burden which the Lord lays on us is meant to press us out of that in which we are walking. So I reasoned with myself: "If I am living in sin, if it be a sin to be where I am, if I must do things which my conscience tells me are sins, and by which my conscience is burdened as sins, the very conviction, the very distress, the very burden, is the answer. It is the voice of God in the conscience, not the voice of God in the air, not the appearance of God in the sky, but the voice of God in the conscience, and the appearance of God in the heart." And on



this simple conviction I was enabled to act, and never to this day have I repented it. I have, therefore, been led to see by experience that we are often expecting signal answers, wonderful answers, mysterious answers, and that the Lord does not mean to give those answers.

The Lord, you see, reserves the way in which He shall give the answer. Are you giving way to some temptation, or under the power of some lust? "Oh!" say you, "I want the Lord to lead me out." Well, is the Lord bearing a solemn witness in your conscience? Is the Lord speaking in that secret court, and manifesting His frown in your soul? *That* is His answer, and He will not vouchsafe to give you any other. It is to that the soul must look, and he that is enabled to hear this reproof in conscience must take it as the answer of God to those prayers which he is putting up for deliverance from the temptation or the sin under which he is labouring.

So, again, the soul sometimes shall call upon the Lord to show it sweet manifestations of Christ, to lead it blessedly into Christ, to settle it down into the liberty of Christ, to make Christ precious, and lead the soul into blessed communion with Him. Well, these sighs, and groans, and cries, and desires, and breathings of the soul come from God; they are His work in the conscience. Now the Lord says—"He shall call upon Me, and I will answer him." But how will He answer him? Why, perhaps by making his shackles heavier, making his fetters more grievous. As it was with the children of Israel in Egypt; they cried to the Lord for deliverance, they groaned and sighed, and their prayers reached the ear of the Lord, and their cries moved His heart; but how did He answer? Their burdens were made heavier; they were to make bricks without straw; they were to be put further from deliverance; and every successive plague only seemed to make the king's heart harder, and deliverance

more improbable. So perhaps with ourselves. We have been crying to the Lord for years to make Christ precious, to lead us into close communion with Him, to open up the secrets of His bosom, and bathe our souls in that love of His which "passeth knowledge;" and we have found some access to a throne of grace in pouring out those desires. Now, the Lord answers them; but how does He answer them? By bringing us into those spots and those states of experience to which these views of Christ are alone applicable. Our feeling would be to loll upon our sofa or to lean in our armchair, and have Christ come into our hearts without any burdens, or distresses, or griefs, or trials, or temptations, or powerful exercises; we want some sweet manifestation of Christ, but we want it to come through a channel which is not a channel of pain and suffering. Now the Lord says, "He shall call upon Me, and I will answer him"—he shall see Christ, he shall have a sweet view of Christ, he shall have a blessed manifestation of Christ, he shall be led up into Christ—but how? By being placed by My hand in those spots in which Christ alone is precious, to which Christ alone is adapted, for which Christ alone is suitable, and from which Christ alone delivers. "He shall call upon Me, and I will answer him."

Sometimes the soul will pray to have power, inward power, to lay hold of God's promises, and to feel the sweetness of these promises within. We read the Scriptures; we see such and such promises made to the elect. "Oh!" say we to ourselves, "what know I of this promise? Surely I have not felt this promise; surely I have not tasted the sweetness of that promise; oh! that the Lord would teach me the sweetness of this promise! Oh! that the Lord would impart to me the enjoyment of that sweet promise!" And the Lord says, "I will; 'he shall call upon Me, and I will answer him;' you shall have the promise, aye, all the promise; you shall have the sweetness of it, the blessedness of it." But mark!

you must be in the path to which that promise is suitable;  
you must be in the trial to which that promise is adapted;  
you must be in the exercise out of which that promise  
delivers; you must be in the difficulty which that promise fits.  
You must have the mortise for the tenon to go into; you  
must have the emptiness to be filled out of Christ's fulness;  
you must have the beggary to be supplied with Christ's  
riches; you must have the bankruptcy to have a sweet and  
full discharge.

And the Lord, when He is going to fulfil the promise, does not show His hand and say, "Now I am leading you into the promise, now I am fulfilling to you the prayer; see how My arm is now bare, and how I am guiding and leading you into the promise after which you have been praying." The Lord does not speak thus in conscience, but hides Himself, and darkens the cloud in our souls; we get farther off from the promise than ever—get as it were miles and leagues away from the point we are trying to approach; like the mariner who is driven away by the winds, we are seeking to get into the promise and are blown aside by gusts and winds further from the point at which we are aiming. But the Lord is all the while leading us into it, because He is bringing us down into the spot to which the promise applies. We say, "Lord, make me rich." He says, "I will; but thou must first be made poor." We say, "Lord, let me have a precious view of Christ." "I will; but you must first have a wretched view of self." "Let me know the riches of Christ's blood." "I will; but you must first know the depth of your guilt," "Let me know what it is to stand complete in Christ's righteousness." "I will; but you must first sink down in self-loathing and self-abhorrence." So that the Lord takes His own path, and chooses His own way, to bring about His own purposes in such a mysterious manner that reason is staggered, nature gives up the ghost, and all the powers of flesh and blood fail; and get to their

wits' end; and the Lord brings about the fulfilment of that promise which we have been desiring to get into, and the enjoyment of which we have been longing richly to feel.

So then, "He shall call upon Me, and I will answer Him." The Lord encourages His people to call upon Him for whatsoever they want. Not to go with lip-service; not to go with made-up tales; but the Lord encourages all His blood-bought family whom He has quickened by His Spirit to call upon Him for everything their souls long after; be it deliverance from trouble, be it sweet manifestations of mercy, be it a blessed enjoyment of Christ, be it for a heart enlarged, be it for the liberty of the gospel, be it to stand firm in Jesus, be it to be brought out of any temptation under which they are labouring. "Open thy mouth wide," says the Lord, "and I will fill it." "Whatsoever thou askest, believing, thou shalt receive." The Lord encourages His people to open their mouth and tell Him what they have need of. "Pour out your heart before Me," says the Lord. Well, the soul is sometimes enabled to do so. Have not you and I, friends, been enabled to pour out our hearts at a throne of grace, and tell the Lord what we really wanted, what we really longed for, and tell Him that nothing but that which He alone could give would satisfy and comfort our souls? There have been such times of access to the throne of grace. And afterwards, perhaps, we have forgotten the things we told Him of; we have been heedless of the prayers we laid at His feet; and though very earnest at the time in seeking after certain blessings, we left them, as it were, at the Lord's feet, and forgot them all. But the Lord does not forget them—they are treasured up in His heart and memory; and in His own time He brings them to light, and gives the fulfilment of them. But before He does it He will bring us into the spot where we want them again, and then we have to tell Him again, and supplicate Him again, and ask Him again, ashamed of ourselves, perhaps, that we

should have asked the Lord for these blessings and been as heedless of them as though we did not care to receive them at His hand; but still, under pressure, under trouble, under soul necessity, under grief, we go and tell Him again. And then the Lord in His own way and time brings about the very thing we desired of Him. Perhaps it is some temptation under which we have been labouring for months; some grievous sin, which is continually put by Satan before our eyes, and into which we are afraid we shall tumble headlong; some cursed bait, which that arch-deceiver knows how to dress up in such pleasing colours that our wretched nature wants to grasp it—only it knows there is a hook concealed; or some internal weight of guilt, under which the soul "groans, being burdened." Here is a painful exercise; and the soul cries to the Lord to be delivered from it. "He shall call upon Me, and I will answer Him." There is no use going with it to a man; there is no use keeping it buried in our breasts. Sometimes we get a sullen fit, and we will not tell the Lord any more what we feel—He has delayed the answer so long; like a sullen child that will not ask his parent for the very bread that he wants to eat; but we must be brought out of this sulky fit. Whatever the Lord means to give, He from time to time enlarges our heart to ask; and keeps us waiting, pleading, sighing, suing, groaning, and begging at His blessed feet, for those things without which we must perish eternally, without which we cannot comfortably live, and without which we cannot happily die. And so it is no matter of choice, it is no matter left to the free-will of man, whether he will pray or not; but it is so laid upon his heart, so brought into his soul, it is so pressed out of him by the heavy loads put upon him, that he is compelled, whether he will or not, to cry to the Lord for those things. He must have them or die. And then, from time to time, in His own time and in His own way, He brings everything to pass which the soul wants to have brought to pass; opens up ways, brings deliverances,

lifts out of trials, removes burdens, makes a way in the deep, which no eye but His could see and no hand but His could open, leads the soul into it, brings the soul through it, and then hides all glory from the creature by making us fall down before His feet and ascribe glory, and honour, and power, and thanksgiving, and salvation unto God and the Lamb.