

Andrew Murray:

Again I say unto you, That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in my Name, there am I in the midst of them.—Matt. xviii. 19, 20.

ONE of the first lessons of our Lord in His school of prayer was: Not to be seen of men. Enter thy inner chamber; be alone with the Father. When He has thus taught us that the meaning of prayer is personal individual contact with God, He comes with a second lesson: You have need not only of secret solitary, but also of public united prayer. And He gives us a very special promise for the united prayer of two or three who agree in what they ask. As a tree has its root hidden in the ground and its stem growing up into the sunlight, so prayer needs equally for its full development the hidden secrecy in which the soul meets God alone, and the public fellowship with those who find in the name of Jesus their common meeting-place.

The reason why this must be so is plain. The bond that unites a man to his fellow-men is no less real and close than that which unites him to God: he is one with them. Grace renews not alone our relation to God but to man too. We not only learn to say 'My Father,' but 'Our Father.' Nothing would be more unnatural than that the children of a family should always meet their father separately, but never in the united expression of their desires or their love. Believers are not only members of one family, but even of one body. Just as each member of the body depends on the other, and the full action of the spirit dwelling in the body depends on the union and co-operation of all, so Christians cannot reach the full blessing God is ready to bestow through His Spirit, but as they seek and receive it in fellowship with each other. It is in the union and fellowship of believers that the Spirit can manifest His full power. It was to the hundred and twenty continuing in one place together, and praying with one accord, that the Spirit came from the throne of the glorified Lord.

The marks of true united prayer are given us in these words of our Lord. The first is agreement as to the thing asked. There must not only be generally the consent to agree with anything another may ask: there must be some special thing, matter of distinct united desire; the agreement must be, as all prayer, in spirit and in truth. In such agreement it will become very clear to us what exactly we are asking, whether we may confidently ask according to God's will, and whether we are ready to believe that we have received what we ask.

The second mark is the gathering in, or into, the Name of Jesus. We shall afterwards have much more to learn of the need and the power of the Name of Jesus in prayer; here our Lord teaches us that the Name must be the centre of union to which believers gather, the bond of union that makes them one, just as a home contains and unites all who are in it. 'The Name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous runneth into it and escape.' That Name is such a reality to those who understand and believe it, that to meet within it is to have Himself present. The love and unity of His disciples have to Jesus infinite attraction: 'Where two or three are gathered in my Name, there am I in the midst of them.' It is the living presence of Jesus, in the fellowship of His loving praying disciples, that gives united prayer its power.

The third mark is, the sure answer: 'It shall be done for them of my Father.' A prayer-meeting for maintaining religious fellowship, or seeking our own edification, may have its use; this was not the Saviour's view in its appointment. He meant it as a means of securing special answer to prayer. A prayer meeting without recognised answer to prayer ought to be an anomaly. When any of us have distinct desires in regard to which we feel too weak to exercise the needful faith, we ought to seek strength in the help of other. In the unity of faith and of love and of the Spirit, the power of the Name and the Presence of Jesus acts more freely and the answer comes more surely. The mark that there has been true united prayer is the fruit, the answer, the receiving of the thing we have asked: 'I say unto you, It shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven.'

What an unspeakable privilege this of united prayer is, and what a power it might be. If the believing husband and wife knew that they were joined together in the Name of Jesus to experience His presence and power in united prayer (1 Peter); if friends believed what mighty help two or three praying in concert could give each other; if in every prayer meeting the coming together in the Name, the faith in the Presence, and the expectation of the answer, stood in the foreground; if in every Church united effectual prayer were regarded as one of the chief purposes for which they are banded together, the highest exercise of their power as a Church; if in the Church universal the coming of the kingdom, the coming of the King Himself, first in the mighty outpouring of

His Holy Spirit, then in His own glorious person, were really matter of unceasing united crying to God;—O who can say what blessing might come to, and through, those who thus agreed to prove God in the fulfilment of His promise.

In the Apostle Paul we see very distinctly what a reality his faith in the power of united prayer was. To the Romans he writes (xv. 30): 'I beseech you, brethren, by the love of the Spirit, that ye strive together with me in your prayer to God for me.' He expects in answer to be delivered from his enemies, and to be prospered in his work. To the Corinthians (2 Cor. i. 11), 'God will still deliver us, ye also helping together on our behalf by your supplications;' their prayer is to have a real share in his deliverance. To the Ephesians he writes: 'With all prayer and supplication praying at all seasons in the Spirit for all the saints and on my behalf, that utterance may be given unto me.' His power and success in his ministry he makes to depend on their prayers. With the Philippians (i. 19) he expects that his trials will turn to his salvation and the progress of the gospel 'through your supplications and the supply of the spirit of Jesus Christ.' To the Colossians (iv. 3) he adds to the injunction to continue steadfast in prayer: 'Withal praying for us too, that God may open unto us a door for the word.' And to the Thessalonians (2 Thess. iii. 1) he writes: 'Finally, brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may run and be glorified, and that we may be delivered from unreasonable men.' It is everywhere evident that Paul felt himself the member of a body, on the sympathy and co-operation of which he was dependent, and that he counted on the prayers of these Churches to gain for him, what otherwise might not be given. The prayers of the Church were to him as real a factor in the work of the kingdom, as the power of God.

Who can say what power a Church could develop and exercise, if it gave itself to the work of prayer day and night for the coming of the kingdom, for God's power on His servants and His word, for the glorifying of God in the salvation of souls? Most Churches think their members are gathered into one simply to take care of and build up each other. They know not that God rules the world by the prayers of His saints; that prayer is the power by which Satan is conquered; that by prayer the Church on earth has disposal of the powers of the heavenly world. They do not remember that Jesus has, by His promise, consecrated every assembly in His Name to be a gate of heaven, where His Presence is to be felt, and His Power experienced in the Father fulfilling their desires.

We cannot sufficiently thank God for the blessed week of united prayer, with which Christendom in our days opens every year. As proof of our unity and our faith in the power of united prayer, as a training-school for the enlargement of our hearts to take in all the needs of the Church universal, as a help to united persevering prayer, it is of unspeakable value. But very specially as a stimulus to continued union in prayer in the smaller circles, its blessing has been great. And it will become even greater, as God's people recognise what it is, all to meet as one in the Name of Jesus to have His presence in the midst of a body all united in the Holy Spirit, and boldly to claim the promise that it shall be done of the Father what they agree to ask.

'LORD, TEACH US TO PRAY'

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Blessed Lord! who didst in Thy high-priestly prayer ask so earnestly for the unity of Thy people, teach us how Thou dost invite and urge us to this unity by Thy precious promise given to united prayer. It is when we are one in love and desire that our faith has Thy presence and the Father's answer.

O Father! we pray for Thy people, and for every smaller circle of those who meet together, that they may be one. Remove, we pray, all selfishness and self-interest, all narrowness of heart and estrangement, by which that unity is hindered. Cast out the spirit of the world and the flesh, through which Thy promise loses all its power. O let the thought of Thy presence and the Father's favour draw us all nearer to each other.

Grant especially Blessed Lord, that Thy Church may believe that it is by the power of united prayer that she can bind and loose in heaven; that Satan can be cast out; that souls can be saved; that mountains can be removed; that the kingdom can be hastened. And grant, good Lord! that in the circle with which I pray, the prayer of the Church may indeed be the power through which Thy Name and Word are glorified. Amen.