

~Other Speakers M-R: Thomas Reade:

67. CHRIST'S INTERCESSORY PRAYER

"And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Comforter to be with you forever." John 14:16

The last discourses which our Savior held with his disciples, closing them with his intercessory prayer, have been, and ever will be, a source of the richest consolation to his Church. While we read them in a spirit of love towards him who uttered them, our language will be that of the two disciples walking to Emmaus; "Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way."

Those are, indeed, to be pitied, who can peruse, unmoved, those gracious words which proceeded out of his lips. Truly he spoke, as never man spoke. His words are spirit, and they are life.

How many Christians, baptized in the name of Christ, and professing themselves to be members of his visible Church, would rather read an exciting novel, or some highly-wrought work of fiction, than these words of eternal life. How true are the parables of our Lord, which describe those mixed characters, which abound in the so-called religious world. Surely it must be the duty of faithful ministers to point out the distinction, and to guard their hearers against self-delusion. But is it always so?

The beautiful Intercessory Prayer of our Redeemer, as recorded in the seventeenth chapter of John's gospel, is full of the riches of the Covenant of Grace, and sets forth, in the most lively manner, the character and privileges of his people. We learn from the supplications of our Lord to the Eternal Father, that all true believers are the gift of the Father to the Son. "You have given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as you have given him." "I have manifested your name unto the men which you gave me out of the world; yours they were, and you gave them to me." "I pray not for the world, but for those who you have given me; for they are yours." "Holy Father, keep through your own name those whom you have given me, that they may be one, as we are." "Father, I will that they also, whom you have given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory."

These gracious petitions, which embrace all true believers, evidently declare that in the Covenant of Grace, entered into between the three Divine Persons in the Godhead, Jesus Christ had a people given to him, before the foundation of the world, which he should redeem unto himself in time, and glorify to all eternity. For this reason, the angel said, "His name shall be called Jesus; for he shall save his people from their sins." And to complete this act of mercy, Christ declared, "Where I am, there shall also my servant be."

In unison with these supplicatory addresses of our Lord, he declared in the synagogue at Capernaum, "All that the Father gives me shall come to me; and him that comes to me I will never cast out." "This is the Father's will who has sent me, that of all which he has given me I should lose none, but should raise them up again at the last day." "No man can come to me, unless the Father, who has sent me, draws him." "No man can come unto me, unless it were given unto him of my Father." "It is written in the prophets, And they shall be all taught of God. Every man therefore that has heard, and has learned of the Father, comes unto me."

The natural heart is now, as it was when these blessed words were spoken. We read, "From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him." They could not receive the doctrine of Christ; they were offended at him; they knew not the spiritual nature of true faith which can feed upon Christ as the nourishment of the soul. And in this our day, the more spiritual, the more experimental, any statement of Gospel Truth is, and the more it will be opposed by some who call themselves, "Masters in Israel;" and be derided by others, who pride themselves as being members of the Church. The heart, if unrenewed, is the same under every outward guise. The Pharisees, the Sadducees, the Herodians, all opposed the Holy Savior.

Jesus, by his word, speaks to us as he did to the Apostles; "Will you also go away?" Oh! that the constant language of our hearts may be, "Lord, to whom shall we go? you have the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure that you are the Christ, the Son of the living God." How anxiously should we guard against declension, remembering the words of our Lord to the presiding minister of the Ephesian Church; "I have somewhat against you, because you have left your first love."

The humble believer sees a fund of blessedness in these petitions of his Lord; and, while standing, by faith, on this immovable Rock, he can say with joyful heart; "He has set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings. And he has put a new song in my mouth, even praise unto our God."

In this Intercessory Prayer, we learn much of the character of Christ, as the Great Head of his Church. "Father, glorify your Son, that your Son also may glorify you." "I have finished the work which you gave me to do." "I have given unto them the words which you gave me." "They have known surely that I came out from you, and they have believed that you sent me." "As you have sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world." "That they all may be one; as you, Father, are in me, and I in you." "The glory which you gave me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one." "That they may behold my glory, which you have given me; for you loved me before the foundation of the world." "Glorify me with your own self, with the glory which I had with you before the world was."

Jesus declared himself to be the Son of the Eternal Father. One with the Father. Glorious in himself before the foundation of the world. The Prophet of his Church. The Savior of sinners. Oh! that I may ever receive the adorable Jesus, as God manifest in the flesh. With such plain declarations from the lips of Christ himself, how fearful it is that any should dare to deny his divinity. The fallen spirits did not commit this sin, for they confessed his Godhead; "What have we to do with you, Jesus, Son of God?" The Savior wanted not the testimony of Satan, therefore he "allowed not the devils to speak, because they knew him."

But to the deniers of his divinity, among men, mercy is offered, if they will turn unto him by faith and repentance. Oh! how gracious are the words of our compassionate Redeemer. "Whoever speaks a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him." Saul, of Tarsus, drew his own character, and the Savior's grace. "I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has enabled me, for that he counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry; who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious; but I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief." The sin of Saul was, therefore, not the sin against the Holy Spirit, or he would never have been forgiven. "He did it ignorantly in unbelief."

In his Intercessory Prayer, Jesus points out the character of his redeemed people. "They have known that all things whatever you have given me, are of you." "They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world." "Sanctify them through your truth; your word is truth." "I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth." "That they all may be one; that the world may believe that you have sent me." "That they may be made perfect in one."

Thus wrote John to the believing members of the Christian Church; "You have an unction from the Holy One, and you know all things." "Whoever is born of God overcomes the world." "Whoever is born of God does not commit sin." "If God so loved us, we ought also to love one another."

How different is all this from nominal Christianity; from that religion of the world, which consists in the form of godliness without the power. Such religion, if, indeed, such it can be called, will never cheer the soul in a day of distress, nor support it in the hour of death. In this land of Bibles and Churches, people are almost constrained to show some deference to religion. The man of the world goes to church once on the Sabbath; and, to keep up appearances, will, perhaps, attend at the Lord's table, once in the year. But his heart is not there. From the church he will stroll into the news-room, as if he could not too speedily obliterate the faint impression which the preacher may have made. The afternoon is passed away at his table, or on his horse; and his tedious evening is shortened by retiring earlier than usual to rest. His language is that of the Jews of old; "When will the new moon be gone, that we may sell corn? and the Sabbath, that we may set forth wheat?"

To such ungrateful members of the visible Church, how affecting is the language of the Almighty; "Have I been a wilderness unto Israel?" "O my people, what have I done unto you? and wherein have I wearied you?" "You have wearied the Lord."

In this Intercessory Prayer, the privileges of the true believer are interwoven with the petitions. "All mine are yours, and your are mine; and I am glorified in them." "While I was with them in the world, I kept them in your name; those that you gave me I have kept; and none of them is lost." "I pray not that you should take them out of the world, but that you should keep them from the evil one." "Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word." "You have loved them as you have loved me." "I have declared unto them your name, and will declare it; that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them."

No language can convey to the spiritual mind greater blessings than these. Oh! for faith to receive, with child-like simplicity, these gracious truths, which dropped from the lips of incarnate Love.

As the blind are unaffected by the most sublime prospects, and the deaf by the sweetest sounds, so do these

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displays of sovereign grace, these accents of redeeming mercy, produce no saving benefit on the carnal mind. Unbelief and pride, sensuality and the love of the world, hypocrisy and formality, like so many bars, close the citadel of the heart. Nothing can dislodge the strong man armed, but the mighty power of God. No human efforts will avail. Who can stop the whirlwind with a feather? or the rolling tide with a straw? So helpless is man, when he attempts in his own strength, to stem the torrent of his corruptions. He, who said, "Let there be light and there was light;" He, who said to the wind and waves, "Peace, be still;" He, who said to Lazarus, "Come forth!" and the dead arose; can alone subdue the heart, and make the sinner willing in the day of his power.

It is delightful to dwell upon this comprehensive prayer of our blessed Savior. Here I am taught, that all who are the subjects of grace, are the gift of the Father to the Son; that to such, the Son gives eternal life; that the beginning of this eternal life is to know the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom he has sent; that this knowledge is imparted by Jesus Christ through the teaching of the Spirit of Truth, the Comforter; that this knowledge is of a sanctifying nature; that it leads to a separation from the world, and to a union to each other; that these happy souls are loved by the Father and the Son are kept from the evil that is in the world; and preserved unto eternal glory.

Oh! blessed Lord, You who have cast your bright beams of light upon your Church, how does my heart pant after this blessedness. I cannot claim it; for through sin, I have forfeited every favor; but, let me never cease to crave it, since you have interceded, not only for your Apostles, but for all those who shall believe on you through their word. As a poor suppliant at the door of mercy, I wait in humble expectation of the promised grace. Lord, enable me to believe in you, through the words of your Apostles; then I shall experience all the riches of your love, contained in this precious prayer, which, as the Intercessor of your people, you did present to the Eternal Father.