

Dear Friends,

In one of his many sermons on the subject of prayer, Charles Haddon Spurgeon gives us a great word of encouragement with regards to coming to God with our prayers on the behalf of others. When we pray for others, he is telling us, we are to see the benefits that accrue to ourselves out of doing that very thing. A few of those encouragements then.

First "Thou mayest be sure that the King loves thee, when He will permit thee to speak a word to him on the behalf of a friend." Is that not a precious thought? It is a blessing to our own hearts that we can enter into the courts of the Lord to ask Him something on the behalf of another. But that's not all that it is: it is also a token to our own hearts that we are beloved of the King who permits us to do that! We have a way into the Courts of heaven; we have an access to the Throne on which the King sits. If anyone had such a thing as that in relation to an earthly monarch, it would be a token of some particular standing that the person had with the monarch. We only need multiply that a thousand times over to come to the realisation that our King loved us indeed, to grant such a privilege to us. We should always be conscious of the many, many times when "our" names would have been mentioned in the throne room of heaven long before we ever came there ourselves. When others prayed for us when we had no thought of praying for ourselves. When others took it as a token of the King's love towards them to permit them to speak a word on our behalf before Him. We are to discharge that debt before the Lord, and enjoy the benefits of blessing all bound up in doing so.

Second "Earnest longings for the good of those around us," he goes on to say, "show that we are beginning to take our right position towards our fellow-men, and are no longer living as if we were ourselves the sole end and aim of our existence." Is that not an excellent word for our hearts and minds? To be engaged in asking for others, and praying for others, and seeking the good of others, is one sure way of getting ourselves "off" ourselves, and the things of ourselves. How easy it is to get so caught-up with self that the good and the interests of others fly out the window. There is no better way of reversing that than by constantly lifting up before the Lord the needs and the good of others. "I will that prayer be made for all men," 1Tim.2:1. We are not only directed to do that, but when we do it, there are many benefits which come to our own souls as well.

1. And one final thought - "When we beg for conversions, we are asking for Christ, and with Christ; and herein we have fellowship with Him." Spurgeon bases this thought on the words of the Second Psalm, where Jehovah the Lord addresses our Lord Jesus Christ in prophecy with regards to the work that He would come into the world to accomplish. "Ask of me (my son) and I will give thee the heathen for thine inheritance." So - "When we beg for conversions, we are asking for Christ, and with Christ; and herein, we have fellowship with Him." A great thought - that the prayer that Christ was told to pray by His Father was for the conversion of the heathen, so that, when we do the same, we are praying "for" Him, and "with" Him. The success of that work is assured as it rests on Christ alone, the Great

High Priest who made the sacrifice and ever lives to make intercession. But what His people are constitutes a "kingdom of priests" under Him, and may pray for that for which His Father told Him to pray for. "Pray that the Lord of the harvest will send forth labourers into the harvest". In numerous ways we are called to pray for others: believers and unbelievers, as well. May the foregoing thought of the Lord's departed servant show us that there is great benefit and blessing for ourselves in doing that very thing.

Yours sincerely,
W.J. Seaton.

Personal Note .

On account of my retirement from the full time ministry of the Church here in Inverness, I have decided to set aside the ministry of the Wicket Gate also. This, then, will be its final issue, and we can only express our gratitude to those who have supported the wee magazine over the years. We are thankful to the Lord that He has seen fit to use it in His own way since it was first published in January 1967. My wife joins me in expressing our thanks. We will remain active in the church, of course, as the Lord ordains.

The Seatons.

TEACHING AND TRAINING

There are two things that should never be separated in the Christian life; they are **TEACHING** and **TRAINING**.

When the word of God exhorts us to "TRAIN up a child in the way that he should go, and when he is old he shall not depart from it", it envisages more than simply informing the child of those things that he ought to know, and ought to be aware of. What is fully involved in the operation is the constant directing of the child, and guiding of the child - much as a gardener would direct a certain plant, or "train" a certain plant to grow in the direction that he required.

This we all acknowledge to be a valid and worthwhile exercise with our children - or with our plants, as the case might be - and where we have children, we, no doubt, endeavour to follow the exhortation, and not only see them taught in the things that they ought to know, but also trained in the things they ought to do.

Now, what holds good with our children in general, holds good with the children of God in particular. And it is our duty and calling under God, not only to be taught in the things of His word, but to be trained in the things of His word, as well.

We are TAUGHT in the word of God, in the first place, when we are made aware of what the Lord requires of us as His people. This is an absolutely essential exercise, for without the instruction of the word of God to our souls, we have no clear directives to follow in our Christian lives, and no real gauge for our Christian experiences.

It is by His word that the Lord tells us how we must live, and how we must think, and how we must face various issues and circumstances in our pilgrimage. All such things we must know, and all such things we should endeavour to be taught in and instructed in as the children of the living God.

A great deal of the word of God, especially in the epistles, is devoted to TEACHING us the things that belong to our faith, and this teaching takes in the whole gamut of our lives - from our behaviour in "the house of God", which is "the pillar and ground of truth", to our behaviour in our own houses, as husbands and wives, or parents and children. Whether as "citizens of heaven", or citizens in this world yet, there is certainly no shortage of teaching in the word of God regarding our manner of life.

But the true Christian life extends beyond knowing. As the Saviour put it on one occasion, "If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them." The real blessedness of Biblical truth to our lives is not in simply being able to comprehend and know the truth; it is in being able to perform the truth, and that's where spiritual TRAINING comes into play.

Spiritual training is simply taking that spiritual teaching from the word of God and practising it, and practising it, until it becomes built into the fabric of our Christian living and thinking. There is no such a thing as "perfectionism" in the word of God, but there is, most-assuredly, a manner of life that is to become characteristic of those

who name the name of the Saviour; and this is only achieved by us through constant endeavour to "train up" ourselves in the way that we ought to go.

Spiritual training is just as necessary to the spiritual existence as a thousand and one forms of other training are to the natural existence. All the knowledge from the instruction books in the world will produce nothing until the instructions are put into practice; and the more they are practised, the more able will the person become in that field.

The Christian life is no different. There are times when we do God's word, because it happens to coincide with what we want to do, or find convenient to do at some given point in our life. Where the TRAINING comes in, is in "bending" the plant in the direction that the word requires. The more we endeavour to do that in our lives, the less we will find ourselves "departing" from that way that the Lord directs us.

"We on Thy holy Word, would feed, and live, and grow;
Go on to know Thee, Lord, and practice what we know."

John Bunyan and the Wayfaring Life

Part 4

In the course of that description which Valiant for Truth gave of Madam Bubble, he makes mention of "Demas", as one whom the world had lured away; and that's not the only time that Bunyan uses Demas as a warning to each and every Pilgrim who would ever make their way to the Celestial City. Just after Christian moved on from the town of Vanity, he met up with several parties along the way who endeavoured to move him off the way; and one of these was Demas. Bunyan makes Demas - the Keeper of a Silver Mine, which is located on a hill called Lucre, which stands on a plain called Ease; and you don't have to be a genius to put that whole picture together. Demas called out to Christian, and Hopeful, who had now joined him on the pilgrimage - to come and do some "digging" in the mine, so that they might "richly provide" for themselves. But, said Christian to Demas - "Is not the place dangerous? Hath it not hindered many in their pilgrimage?" "Not very dangerous," says Demas, "except to those who are careless; But withall," says Bunyan - "He blushed as he spake!

"Some of the others that he met up with at that time, or that he was told about, were people like Mr Smooth-Man, Mr Facing-Both-Ways, Mr Anything; - and a couple called Mr and Mrs Bye-Ends, who tell the Pilgrim about how they view the things of religion for their life. "'Tis true," says Bye-Ends, "we somewhat differ in religion from those of the stricter sort; yet, but in two small points: First, we never strive against wind and tide; secondly, we are always most zealous when Religion goes in silver slippers; we love much to walk with him in the street, if the sun shines, and the people applaud him." As Pilgrim assures him, however, that will never get him to the Celestial City: "If you will go with us," he tells him, "you must go against wind and tide..you must also own Religion in his rags, as well as in his silver slippers; and stand by him too," he tells him, "when bound in irons, as well as when he walks the streets with Applause." "Then I saw in my dream," says Bunyan, "that Christian and Hopeful forsook him, and kept their distance from him."

Christian and Hopeful eventually get to the Celestial City, of course, but there are a few ups and downs which they still have to face on their journey.

I'm sure we're all familiar with Bunyan's "Bye-path Meadow", and "Doubting Castle", and "Giant Despair" who locked the two Pilgrims away in that castle for that period of time. Very simply, what happened was this: - the road on which they were travelling began to get very rough in places, and as they looked over the hedge that ran alongside the road, they saw a very "pleasant Meadow" on the other side. The path through the meadow seemed to run parallel with the path that they were finding so much difficulty with, and so, when they had found a way into the meadow, they began to take that path. The decision seemed to be a good one, for, says Bunyan, "They found (the path) very easy to their feet." And not only that - but they met another traveller on the way, who assured them that the path through the meadow led to the Celestial City. The trouble was, that traveller's name was "Vain Confidence"; but the two Pilgrims drank in his assurance for all that. After a period of time, they begin to realise that the path through the meadow isn't going in the same direction as the path which they have just left - but it's beginning to get dark now; - they can't find their way back to the original path - and all they can do is to sit down and wait for the

daybreak, and hopefully retrieve their steps once again. They fall asleep, of course, because, says Bunyan (in fact) although they thought they had found an easier road for their journey, they had, in fact, wearied themselves! When the day does eventually break, they have a rude awakening, indeed. Bye-Path Meadow was part of the grounds of Giant Despair; and when they opened their eyes, it was Giant Despair who was glowering down upon them. "They had but little to say," says Bunyan, "for they knew themselves to be at fault!"

"...from Wednesday morning till Saturday night," we're told, they lay in "a very dark dungeon" in Doubting Castle: "nasty, and stinking to the spirit of these two men." They were starved, and beaten, and intimidated by the Giant and his Wife, and might have lain there for ever, if Christian hadn't remembered a key that was in his bosom. The key was called Promise: - calculated to open any dungeon door and as Christian put it in the lock - "the door flew open with ease," and the two men began to run for their lives, until they found themselves on the narrow path that leads to life, once more. One thing that you'll always notice about John Bunyan's "true" Pilgrims is this: - that although, they do get themselves into some difficulties at times, they always know where to go to get themselves out of them; and that is simply a reflection of Bunyan's own life, as he walked the Pilgrim pathway. In the "Grace abounding to the Chief of Sinners" - his own account of the Lord's dealings with him - we have a priceless example of this very thing. "About this time," he says, "I took an opportunity to break my mind to an ancient Christian, and told him all my case; I told him also, that I was afraid that I had sinned the sin against the Holy Ghost; and he told me, he thought so too: Here, therefore, I had but cold comfort; but talking a little more with him, I found him, though a good man, a stranger to much combat with the devil. Wherefore - I went to God Again..." "What a fool I am to lie in this stinking dungeon," said Christian, "I have a key in my bosom called Promise." and with that key he opened the door and they went on their way.

They come to the delectable mountains, and to the four shepherds who give them such good advice: - Knowledge, Experience, Watchful, Sincere; that's what the four shepherds are called. They fall to the Flatterer - in spite of what one of the Shepherds had told them - "Beware of the flatterer." Hopeful begins to "swagger" when he hears of the plight of a man called Little-Faith. Gospel Hope can turn into carnal presumption, if we don't keep our eyes on the Lord. They meet up with Ignorance - and Atheist, who begins to ridicule them for ever setting out on such a Pilgrimage. Hopeful goes over all of the Lord's dealings with him; .. and then, eventually, they come to tread the verge of Jordan.

As they begin to cross over, of course, it is Hopeful who holds the head of Christian above the water - the river of death. Right to the end, the old serpent the devil was endeavouring to cast the Christian down, but Hopeful was with him to the end. "Be of good cheer," he tells him, "Jesus Christ maketh thee whole." "And with that, Christian brake out with a loud voice, 'Oh, I see Him again; and He tells me, When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee.' Then they both took courage; and the enemy - after that - was as still as a stone, until they were gone over."

On the other side of the river, they were met by two shining men - Ministering spirits, who were to conduct them to the Gate of the City. They went towards the Gate "with

ease", we're told, on account of these two Shining Men helping them on their way, and because "they had left their mortal garments behind them in the river." "For though they went in with them," says Bunyan, "they came out without them." Now they were among the "spirits of the justified made perfect", awaiting the resurrection morn. Just as they were "drawing towards the gate," we're told, "a company of the heavenly host came out to meet them," and the Two Shining Ones told them - "these are the men that have loved our Lord, when they were in the world, and have left all for His Holy Name..." And then - as they entered in through the gate, they were "transfigured", and given garments of "gold", and "harps and crowns", "and all the bells of the City rang with joy, and it was said unto them - 'Enter ye into the joy of your Lord.'" And the men themselves also sang says Bunyan, "Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto Him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever."

AMEN.

Let dissolution come when it will, it can do the Christian no harm, for it will be but a passage out of a prison into a palace; out of a sea of troubles into a haven of rest; out of a crowd of enemies to an innumerable company of true, loving and faithful friends; out of shame, reproach and contempt into exceeding great and eternal glory. -

JOHN BUNYAN

Until we come to heaven the world is ours, the good and evil of it, the bitter and the sweet of it, the comforts and the crosses of it, the gains and the losses of it, the love and the hate of it, the smiles and the frowns, the friends and the foes in it. All is designed for, and shall further promote our spiritual and eternal welfare. Life is ours. All the troubles, sickness pains, evil tidings, persecutions, disappointments, losses of relations, shame, reproach, or whatever attends this mortal life, shall be sanctified and blessed to us for our good. Yea, death is ours, that shall be our advantage, our gain, that shall put a full end and period to all our sin and suffering, and be a door of entrance for us into glory in our Father's house. Our things present, our present tears, sorrows, miseries, infirmities, shall be so ordered and over-ruled by the wisdom and love of our Father, that they shall all help us onward to Heaven. Things to come are ours, all that glory to be revealed, that saints' everlasting rest that is prepared for the people of God, that crown of righteousness, of glory, and of life. That kingdom of glory, that unspeakable, that inconceivable state of happiness and blessedness which Christ our lord hath purchased with his blood, all this is ours also.

JOHN BUNYAN

BOYS AND GIRLS

Dear Boys and Girls,

The winter is nearly over now, and soon we will see so many things coming to life in the world around us. Have you noticed how many lessons there are in the Bible about God's creation, and God's creatures? The rainbow, the sheep, the flowers, the ant, the eagle - to name just a few. I'm sure you can think of many more yourselves.

I remember reading a story about a bee, and a great lesson a little boy learned from it. I don't remember the boy's name, but we will call him Bobby.

One day Bobby was playing outside his house in the garden, when suddenly, right over his head and buzzing madly, was a big bee. Bobby was sure that it was going to sting him, and so, he ran as fast as he could to his mother. "Mummy, mummy," he called, "it's going to sting me!" Bobby's mother immediately put her arms around her little boy, and just as she did so, the bee stung her on the arm, and then fell to the ground and crawled away.

She pointed to the bee on the ground: "Look Bobby," she said, "that bee can't harm you any longer; you could even play with it. It can't sting you now, for a bee has only one sting, and it has stung me instead of you, so you are quite safe. I'm happy to have taken the sting instead of you, Bobby, and to have felt the pain instead of you.

"Wasn't that very kind and loving of Bobby's mother, boys and girls? But, I'm sure you all know of One even more loving and kind than that, at least I hope you do. That One, of course, is the Lord Jesus Christ, who took the pain of death on the cross for every one who would believe on His name and be saved. The Bible says that "He bore our sins in his own body on the cross." When we know that, then how thankful we ought to be, and try to please Him at all times.

Yours sincerely,
Mrs Seaton.

JOSEPH OF ARIMATHAEA

When Christ was finally led out of the garden of Gethsemane, and on towards the scenes of judgment and condemnation, a great turmoil of heart and mind was felt in His immediate disciples. As Christ himself had announced, the Shepherd was going to be smitten, and the sheep would be scattered abroad. When He afterwards "gave up the ghost" on the cross, the turmoil of heart and mind settled into a deep depression among many of them. Those who were to "shine as lights in the world" found it difficult to raise even a glimmer during the dark night of the Lord's crucifixion. At that very point, the Almighty in heaven brought forth a "light" which, at that point, had been hidden under a bushel, and in so doing, began the exaltation of His Son, after the days of His humiliation in this world.

The light who came out from under a bushel was a man by the name of Joseph of Arimathaea. Mark tells us that he was "an honourable counsellor", (an honourable member of the Jewish Sanhedrin), "who also waited for the kingdom of God". Luke tells us that he had "not consented" to the judgment of the Sanhedrin in condemning Jesus to death, while Matthew informs us that he was, in fact, "Jesus' disciple". It is John however, who qualifies Matthew's remark, when he tells us that Joseph was, indeed, a disciple of Jesus "but secretly", he says, "for fear of the Jews". Joseph had many qualities, and had even made some kind of a silent witness to Christ, in not voting for His death. For all that, however, he is still designated "a disciple, but secretly, for fear of the Jews". He truly was a light at that point, but one that was still hidden under that "bushel" of the fear of men. All of that was soon to change.

It is best to let John, by the Spirit of God, recount the events surrounding that change. John 19:38, "and after this Joseph of Arimathaea, being a disciple of Jesus, but secretly for fear of the Jews, besought Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus: and Pilate gave him leave...". John then goes on to tell us that Joseph, in company with Nicodemus, and some of the faithful women, took the body of Jesus, prepared it for burial, and then placed it in a new sepulchre "wherein was never man yet laid". The new sepulchre, of course, belonged to Joseph, and was now being provided by him for the burial of Christ's body.

Two things are to be noted in the whole affair: First, that it was a tremendously courageous thing Joseph of Arimathaea did, and secondly, when it was he did it, according to the Word of God.

The courage of Joseph is not to be overlooked in going into Pontius Pilate and asking for the body of Jesus. Pilate had endured what must have been one of the most trying days of his career. The Jewish leaders had wakened him at first light to pursue the carrying out of the death penalty on this Jesus of Nazareth, and what had followed had caused him one concern after another. By the time nightfall had arrived, he more than likely had endured enough. When Joseph, therefore, ventured into the presence of Pilate with his request, he must have known he was venturing into a potential den of lions. Yet he did it. Mark tells us that "he went in boldly unto Pilate and craved the body of Jesus." Quite obviously, then, the one who had been "a disciple of Jesus, but

secretly for fear of the Jews", was a secret disciple no longer. In his very bold and deliberate action, he stood identified with this Christ, and all His ways. What made the difference?

It is John, again, who records the time factor involved in the whole courageous affair, John 19:38, "And after this, Joseph of Arimathaea", etc. "After THIS"; and the preceding verses of John chapter 19 will show us what is entailed in "this ". It is all the scenes of the crucifixion of Christ, where John sees Him in all His gracious work on the cross for sinners. "And after THIS", he says, "Joseph of Arimathaea..."

To what degree of fulness Joseph understood the crucifixion at that point is difficult to say; but one thing is sure, it was in the light of that crucifixion that Joseph's light first began to shine brightly for Jesus his Lord.

There is a beautiful old hymn by Thomas Kelly, which outlines some of the ways in which the Cross of Christ affects His people. Verse 3 says -

"The Cross! it takes our guilt away;
It holds the fainting spirit up;
It cheers with hope the gloomy day,
And sweetens every bitter cup."

Verse 4 might have been written with Joseph of Arimathaea in mind -

"It makes the coward spirit brave,
And nerves the feeble arm for fight;
It takes the terror from the grave,
And gilds the bed of death with light."

Joseph of Arimathaea was, surely, a "coward spirit" made "brave" by the sight of the Cross of Jesus Christ. "And after this..."

It is thought by some that there is a prophetic reference to Joseph in Isaiah chapter 53, when it says that Christ "made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death". It is suggested that this could be read, "there was a rich man in his death". Whether or not this is the case, it should be seen that God's hand was in the provision of Joseph for Christ. Just what would have happened to the body of Christ after His crucifixion is open to speculation. He had, after all, been condemned as a "transgressor". Would there have been an "honourable" burial for Him? Or would it have been the mass grave of the pit of Gehenna outside Jerusalem? Another question for eternity! Whatever, God saw that the body of His Beloved Son would be laid in a place appropriate to One who had fulfilled all His perfect will. He had lain in a virgin "womb" until the time appointed for His appearance. Now that He had completed the work, He was placed in a virgin "tomb" - wherein was never man yet laid - until His emergence to everlasting glory. In all of this, God provided His lower light.

It is my sweetest comfort, Lord,
And will forever be,
To muse upon the gracious truth,
Of Thy humanity;

For now there sitteth in our flesh,
Upon a throne of light,
One of a human mother born,
In perfect God-hood bright.

Though earth's foundations should be moved,
Down to their lowest deep;
Though all the trembling universe
Into destruction sweep;
Forever, God, forever man,
My Jesus shall endure,
And fixed on Him, my hope remains,
Eternally secure.