

12 Sermons on Prayer

by
Charles H. Spurgeon

Sermon 3 "Order and Argument in Prayer" (Part 2)

*"Oh, that I knew where I might find him! That I might come even to his seat!
I would order my cause before him, and fill my mouth with arguments."*

Job 23:3, 4

II. The second part of prayer is FILLING THE MOUTH WITH ARGUMENTS -- not filling the mouth with words nor good phrases nor pretty expressions, but filling the mouth with arguments. The ancient saints were wont to argue in prayer. When we come to the gate of mercy, forcible arguments are the knocks of the rapper by which the gate is opened.

Why are arguments to be used at all? is the first inquiry; the reply being, Certainly not because God is slow to give, not because we can change the divine purpose, not because God needs to be informed of our circumstances with regard to ourselves or of anything in connection with the mercy asked. The arguments to be used are for our own benefit, not for his. He requires us to plead with him and to bring forth our strong reasons, as Isaiah said, because this will show that we feel the value of the mercy. When a man searches for arguments for a thing, it is because he attaches importance to that which he is seeking. The best prayers I have ever heard in our prayer meetings have been those which have been fullest of argument. Sometimes my soul has been fairly melted down when I have listened to brethren who have come before God feeling the mercy to be really needed, and that they must have it, for they first pleaded with God to give it for this reason, and then for a second, and then for a third, and then for a fourth and a fifth, until they have awakened the fervency of the entire assembly.

My brethren, there is no need for prayer at all as far as God is concerned. But what a need there is for it on our own account! If we were not constrained to pray, I question whether we could even live as Christians. If God's mercies came to us unasked, they would not be half so useful as they now are when they have to be sought for; for now we get a double blessing -- a blessing in the obtaining and a blessing in the seeking. The very act of praying is a blessing. To pray is, as it were, to bathe oneself in a cool purling stream and so to escape from the heat of earth's summer sun. To pray is to mount on eagle's wings above the clouds and get into the clear heaven where God dwells. To pray is to enter the treasure-house of God and to enrich one's self out of an inexhaustible storehouse. To pray is to grasp heaven in one's arms, to embrace the Deity within one's soul, and to feel one's body made a temple of the Holy Ghost. Apart from the answer, prayer is in itself a benediction. To pray, my brethren, is to cast off your burdens; it is to tear away your rags; it is to shake off your diseases; it is to be filled with spiritual vigor; it is to reach the highest point of Christian health. God give us to be much in the holy art of arguing with God in prayer.

The most interesting part of our subject remains. It is a rapid summary and catalog of a few of the arguments which have been used with great success with God.

It is well in prayer to plead with Jehovah *his attributes*. Abraham did so when he laid hold upon God's justice. Sodom was to be pleaded for, and Abraham begins: "Peradventure there be fifty righteous within the city. Wilt thou also destroy and not spare the place for the fifty righteous that are therein? That be far from thee to do after this manner, to slay the righteous with the wicked; and that the righteous should be as the wicked, that be far from thee. Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" Here the wrestling begins. It was a powerful argument by which the patriarch grasped the Lord's left hand and arrested it just when the thunderbolt was about to fall. But there came a reply to it. It was intimated to him that this would not spare the city. And you notice how the good man, when sorely pressed, retreated by inches; and at last, when he could no longer lay hold upon justice, he grasped God's right hand of mercy and that gave him a wondrous hold when he asked that if there were but ten righteous there the city might be spared. So you and I may take hold at any time upon the justice, the mercy, the faithfulness, the wisdom, the long-suffering, the tenderness of God; and we shall find every attribute of the Most High to be, as it were, a great battering ram with which we may open the gates of heaven.

Another mighty piece of ordnance in the battle of prayer is *God's promise*. When Jacob was on the other side of the brook Jabbok and his brother Esau was coming with armed men, he pleaded with God not to suffer Esau to destroy the mother and the children, and as a master reason he pleaded, "And thou said, Surely I will do thee good." Oh the force of that plea! He was holding God to his word, "Thou said." The attribute is a splendid horn of the altar to lay hold upon. But the promise, which has in it the attribute and something more, is a yet mightier holdfast. . . .

Solomon, at the opening of the temple, used this same mighty plea. He pleads with God to remember the word which he had spoken to his father David, and to bless that place. When a man gives a promissory note his honour is engaged. He signs his hand, and he must discharge it when the due time comes or else he loses credit. It shall never be said that God dishonours his bills. The credit of the Most High never was impeached, and never shall be. He is punctual to the moment. He never is before his time, but he never is behind it. You shall search this Book through and you shall compare it with the experience of God's people, and the two tally from the first to the last. And many a hoary patriarch has said with Joshua in his old age, "Not one good thing has failed of all that the Lord God has promised. All has come to pass." My brother, if you have a divine promise you need not plead that with an "if" in it. You may plead with a certainty. If for the mercy which you are now asking you have God's solemnly pledged word, there will scarce be any room for the caution about submission to his will. You know his will. That will is in the promise -- plead it. Do not give him rest until he fulfil it. He meant to fulfil it or else He would not have given it.

A third argument to be used is that employed by Moses -- *the great name of God*. How mightily did he argue with God on one occasion upon this ground! "What will thou do for thy great name? The Egyptians will say, Because the Lord could not bring them into the land, therefore he slew them in the wilderness." There are some occasions when the name of God is very closely tied up with the history of his people. Sometimes in reliance upon a divine promise a believer will be led to take a certain course of action. Now, if the Lord should not be as good as his promise, not only is the believer deceived, but the wicked world looking on would say, Aha! aha! Where is your God? . . . And you, in some severe trouble, when you have fairly received the promise, may say, "Lord, Thou hast said, '*In six troubles I will be with thee, and in seven I will not forsake thee.*' I have told my friends and neighbours that I put my trust in Thee, and if Thou do not deliver me now, where is Thy name? Arise, O God, and do this thing, lest Thy honour be cast into the dust."

So also may we plead *the sorrows of his people*. This is frequently done. Jeremiah is the great master of this art. . . "The precious sons of Zion, comparable to fine gold, how are they esteemed as earthen pitchers, the work of the hands of the potter!" He talks of all their griefs and trials in the siege. He calls upon the Lord to look upon his suffering Zion, and ere long his plaintive cries are heard. Nothing so eloquent with the father as his child's cry. Yes, there is one thing more mighty still, and that is a moan -- when the child is so sick that it is past crying, and lies moaning with that kind of moan which indicates extreme suffering and intense weakness. Who can resist that moan? Ah! and when God's Israel shall be brought very low so that they can scarcely cry but only their moans are heard, then comes the Lord's time of deliverance, and He is sure to show that he loves his people. Dear friends, whenever you also are brought into the same condition, you may plead your moanings. And when you see a church brought very low, you may use her griefs as an argument why God should return and save the remnant of his people.

Brethren it is good to plead with God *the past*. Ah, you experienced people of God, you know how to do this. Here is David's specimen of it: "Thou have been my help. Leave me not, neither forsake me." He pleads God's mercy to him from his youth up. He speaks of being cast upon his God from his very birth, and then he pleads, "Now also, when I am old and grey-headed, O God, forsake me not." Moses also, speaking with God, says, "Thou did bring this people up out of Egypt." As if he would say, "Do not leave thy work unfinished. Thou hast begun to build, complete it. Thou hast fought the first battle; Lord, end the campaign! Go on till Thou gettest a complete victory." How often have we cried in our trouble, "Lord, Thou didst deliver me in such and such a sharp trial, when it seemed as if no help were near. Thou hast never forsaken me yet. I have set up my Ebenezer in Thy name. If Thou had intended to leave me, why hast Thou showed me such things? Hast Thou brought thy servant to this place to put him to shame?" Brethren, we have to deal with an unchanging God, who will do in the future what He has done in the past, because he never turns from his purpose and cannot be thwarted in his design. The past thus becomes a very mighty means of winning blessings from him. . . .

Lastly, the grand Christian argument is *the suffering, the death, the merit, the intercession of Christ Jesus*. Brethren, I am afraid we do not understand what it is that we have at our command when we are allowed to plead with God for Christ's sake. I met with this thought the other day. It was somewhat new to me, but I believe it ought not to have been. When we ask God to hear us, pleading Christ's name, we usually mean, "O Lord, thy dear Son deserves this of thee; do this unto me because of what he merits." But if we knew it, we might go farther. Supposing you should say to me, you who keep a warehouse in the city, "Sir, call at my office and use my name, and say that they are to give you such a thing." I should go in and use your name and obtain my request as a matter of right and a matter of necessity.

This is virtually what Jesus Christ says to us. "If you need anything of God, all that the Father has belongs to me; go and use my name." Suppose you should give a man your checkbook signed with your own name and left blank, to be filled up as he chose. That would be very nearly what Jesus has done in these words, "If ye ask anything in my name, I will give it you." If I had a good name at the bottom of the check, I should be sure that I should get it cashed when I went to the banker with it. So when you have got Christ's name, to whom the very justice of God has become a debtor and whose merits have claims with the Most High, when you have Christ's name there is no need to speak with fear and trembling and bated breath. Oh waver not and let not faith stagger! When you plead the name of Christ you plead that which shakes the gates of hell, and which the hosts of

heaven obey; and God himself feels the sacred power of that divine plea.

III. If the Holy Ghost shall teach us how to order our cause, and how to fill our mouth with arguments, the result shall be that we SHALL HAVE OUR MOUTH FILLED WITH PRAISES.

The man who has his mouth full of arguments in prayer shall soon have his mouth full of benedictions in answer to prayer. Dear friend, you have your mouth full this morning, have you? What of? Full of complaining? Pray the Lord to rinse your mouth out of that black stuff, for it will little avail you, and it will be bitter in your bowels one of these days. Oh, have your mouth full of prayer, full of it, full of arguments so that there is room for nothing else. Then come with this blessed mouthful and you shall soon go away with whatsoever you have asked of God. Only delight yourself in him and he will give you the desire of your heart.

It is said -- I know not how truly -- that the explanation of the text, "Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it," may be found in a very singular Oriental custom. It is said that not many years ago (I remember the circumstance being reported) the King of Persia ordered the chief of his nobility, who had done something which greatly gratified him, to open his mouth. And when he had done so, he began to put into his mouth pearls, diamonds, rubies, and emeralds until he had filled it as full as it could hold and then he bade him go his way. This is said to have been occasionally done in Oriental courts toward great favorites. Now certainly whether that be an explanation of the text or not, it is an illustration of it. God says, "Open thy mouth with arguments," and then he will fill it with mercies priceless, gems unspeakably valuable. Would not a man open his mouth wide to have it filled in such a style? Surely the most simple-minded among you would be wise enough for that. Oh, let us then open wide our mouths when we have to plead with God. Our needs are great, let our requests be great, and the supply shall be great too.

"Order and Argument in Prayer" in Charles H. Spurgeon, *12 Sermons on Prayer* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1971; reprint).