

# Prayer Answered in Judgment

By Harry Allen Ironside

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By H.A. Ironside

There are not wanting in Scripture striking illustrations of what sometimes happens when there is persistence in demanding of God what He is loath to give, because in His infinite wisdom He has something far better for us than we in our folly realize. We have already seen that it is only as abiding in Christ and with His words abiding in us that we can pray in His name, knowing that whatsoever we ask the Father, we shall receive of Him because we do His will and are pleasing in His sight. A restless will may lead us to pray to our own hurt, and if there be not a timely recognition of this, accompanied by self-judgment and submission to the word of God, we may find our prayers answered only to our deepest distress and sorrow afterwards.

The fretful demands of the people of Israel in the wilderness when they insistently cried for flesh meat is a case in point. When the Psalmist recapitulates their desert experiences, he tells us how “they soon forgot His works; they waited not for His counsel: but lusted exceedingly in the wilderness, and tempted God in the desert. And He gave them their request; but send leanness into their soul” (Psalm 106:13-15). Faith would have reckoned on the unfailing care of God, and a subject people would have left it to Him to provide the kind of food which He saw would be best for them, but their lustful hearts were set upon one particular thing. Without it they were sure they could not be happy. At that moment, nothing seemed so important as the gratification of their desires. Not content with “angels’ food,” the manna from heaven, which He gave them so abundantly, they cried, “Our soul loathes this light bread; who will give us flesh to eat?” We are told in another psalm that “He caused the east wind to blow in the heaven, and by His power He brought the south wind. He rained flesh also upon them as dust, and feathered fowls like as the sand of the sea: and He let it fall in the midst of their camp, round about their habitations. So they did eat, and were well filled: for He gave them their own desire: (Psalm 78:26-29). Doubtless many would have looked upon this as a most remarkable answer to prayer, and would have taken it for granted that the answer in itself proved that the prayer was right and proper. Such a conclusion, however, would have been far from correct; for the in verses that follow we read: “They were not estranged from their lust. But while their meat was yet in their mouths, the wrath of God came upon them, and slew the fattest of them and smote down the chosen men of Israel: (verse 30-31). The fact that we receive what we pray for does not, therefore, in every instance, indicate either a right state of soul on our part or, on the other hand God’s pleasure in our petition. It may be just as true now as then that God will in His indignation grant our request and send leanness into our souls.

The mistake has often been made of taking it for granted that if God seems to prosper a certain undertaking for instance, in which the heart is engaged, therefore it must have His approval. Later

circumstances may show clearly that He was simply allowing us to have our own way in order that we might learn a lesson through eating of the fruit of our devices, a proof of our own folly in persisting in a course for which we did not have a “Thus saith the Lord.”

Another striking example of what we are considering is that of Israel when they desired a king. Earnestly they pleaded that they might become like the nations around them with a king ruling over them and leading them out to battle. God took them at their word; a king was provided, and when they saw him, they were filled with delight. A heroic noble figure, he towered head and shoulders above the people. Just the ideal ruler and warrior, as men might think. But He who looks not on outward appearances, but on the heart, knew well the character of the man who was so readily acclaimed as king when presented to them by Samuel the prophet. Years afterwards He says through Hosea: “Oh Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself; but in Me is thine help. I will be thy king: where is any other that may save thee in all thy cities? And thy judges of whom thou saidst. Give me a king and princes? I gave thee a king in mine anger, and took him away in my wrath” (Hosea 13:9-11). In their demand for a king, they were really rejecting God who had ruled them hitherto, yet He allowed their plea, provided a king Himself, and used that king to chasten and afflict them. It was another case of prayer answered in judgment.

It is never safe to trust to what some people call Providence while neglecting obedience to the Word. Let me cite a case in point that came recently under my notice. A Christian young woman became deeply infatuated with a brilliant but Christless young man. An engagement was entered into, but Christian friends were earnestly praying that God would deliver her from an unequal yoke, which they felt would only bring sorrow into her life. It was a delicate matter to discuss with her. In fact, she resented what she called any interference with her private affairs. However, in a short time an estrangement ensued, and the young man himself broke the engagement. Instead of recognizing that this was God’s method of deliverance for her, the young woman was greatly distressed, and prayed day and night that the offended one might return to her and the engagement again be entered into. All that Christian friends could do to occupy her mind and heart with other interests, or to show her that God had acted in mercy toward her, availed nothing. Constantly she grieved, and persistently she prayed that the desire of her heart might be granted. Strikingly enough, he returned to her most unexpectedly, took all the blame of the past upon himself, and asked for a renewal of the engagement. Gladly she entered into this, and shortly afterwards they were married. If I thought that there was any possibility that her eye would fall upon this page, I probably would not pen these words. Years of sorrow and misery have resulted from her disobedience to the Word of God; yet she insisted at the time that it was God who had answered her prayer, and brought back her loved one to her. His deep hatred of Christ

and the things of God, camouflaged for a time by a gentlemanly exterior, soon manifested itself, and before long a separation ensued, and she was left in wretchedness and misery with two little children dependent upon her. Deeply has she realized as the years have gone on that what she thought was a token of God's approval was but His chastening hand upon her because of her willfulness.

Instances such as the above might be multiplied almost without number in the lives of God's children. I was in a home some years ago where a poor mother was laboring under the grief of caring for an imbecile son who did not so much as seem to recognize her in the slightest way. She told me that years before, when he was a little baby in his cradle, he was taken ill with scarlet fever. The physicians gave him up, declaring there was no hope, but her heart was rebellious. She felt she could not let him go. Going into another room she fell upon her knees, and told God she could never love Him again, if He took her child from her. Within an hour, there was decided evidence of improvement. The little one recovered, but he never recognized his mother again. Her own heart had become tender and subdued through the years. The rebellion was all gone, but she said to me: "How much wiser it would have been, if I could have said, "Thy will be done.""

When a seeming crisis is reached in the life, and the soul is filled with perplexity as to what would be for the best, it is always the part of wisdom to remember that the Holy Spirit Himself indwells the believer, and when we know not what to pray for as we ought, He can be trusted to make intercession for us according to the will of God with groanings that cannot be uttered. The subject heart, instead of insisting that God do according to its natural desires, will pray with Jeremiah: "Oh Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself; it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps. O Lord, correct me, but with judgment; not in your anger, lest Thou bring me to nothing" (Jeremiah 10: 23-24). None need be afraid to trust everything in His hands who is deeply concerned about the welfare of each of His own, and who had declared in His Word that "All things work together for good to those who love God; who are called according to his purpose" (Romans 8:28).

We often have to learn, indeed, that His ways are not our ways, but infinitely above them, and we shall praise Him at last for every seeming disappointment when we see "the end of the Lord."

"I asked the Lord that I might grow  
In truth and love and every grace,  
Might more of His salvation know,  
And seek more earnestly His face.

"'Twas He who taught me thus to pray,  
And He is trust has answered prayer;  
But it has been in such a way  
As almost drove me to despair."

He is the Husbandman. We are the trees of His planting. He can be depended upon to do what is best for His own. We have cost Him too much for Him to be indifferent to our welfare now. And so we may well say,

“O Lord, whate’er my path may be,  
If only I may walk with Thee  
And talk with Thee along the way,  
I’ll praise Thee for it all some day.”

It is part of the chastening of the Lord to put the soul through experiences where it learns the utter unprofitableness of the flesh and is cast entirely upon God. No such experience is without real value, and recognizing this, we shall tread softly and pray submissively, remembering with whom we have to do. Nor should we think of chastisement as though it were synonymous with punishment. It is the educative process of the soul, and is all in love, and never in anger. Its object is ever our blessing, and it invariably yields “the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who are exercised thereby.”

The weary ones had rest, the sad had joy  
That day, and wondered “how?”  
A ploughman, singing at his work, had prayed—  
“Lord, Help them now!”

Away in foreign lands they wondered “how”  
Their simple word had power  
At home, the Christians two or three had met  
To pray an hour!

Yes, we are always wondering, wondering, “how,”  
Because we do not see  
Some one, unknown perhaps, and far away,  
On bended knee!

—Anonymous