

George Muller Sermons

Chapter 12 - An Address at Bristol, January 13, 1870

An Address delivered at a United Meeting for Prayer, held in the Broadmead Rooms, Bristol, January 13, 1870. The meeting was convened-To entreat God for a blessing on His work in Bristol-for the attainment of a deeper knowledge of Holy Scripture by Christians in Great Britain and throughout the world-for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in the conversion of souls-for the progress of the Reformation at home and abroad, and for the spread of the gospel in Roman Catholic countries-for His overruling mercy in reference to the unscriptural designs of the Ecumenical Council-for the closer union and fuller co-operation of believers in Christ, and for the speedy coming of His kingdom.

It appears to me that, for the profit of the younger brethren in Christ, a few practical remarks, and a few hints with reference to the subjects on account of which we have met to pray, may not be out of place. I rejoiced when I saw what subjects were announced for prayer. We are first invited to ask God for a blessing on His work in Bristol. The particular point here is in Bristol. Not, at this church or this chapel; not, at this Sunday school or another Sunday-school; not, in connection with the particular movements of individual Christians, or city missionaries, or district visitors, but the work of God in Bristol. This at once brings before us that we are one in Christ, and all interested in His work that is going on around us. Beloved in Christ, the realizing our oneness in Christ may be tested by the extent to which we feel interested about the work of God that is going on in the hands of others. It is the will of the Lord. that we should rejoice with those who rejoice,-if they are fellow-believers; and it is His will that we should weep with those who weep,-if they are fellow-believers; and therefore if it please God to work a mighty work in the way of conversion-though as to myself I had not the least to do with it-I ought to rejoice. If God is pleased to use individuals as instruments of blessing, though known only by name to me, I ought to rejoice in the work of God. First, I am to give myself to pray for the work in which I am engaged, and to which God has been pleased to call me; but I am not to be satisfied with this. I ought to pray for the work of God in this city generally. Let me affectionately ask my beloved fellow-believers whether they are in the habit of doing so? It is a solemn and important question. If not, let me affectionately press this upon my fellow-believers, especially my younger brethren and sisters. I say-not boastingly, but simply to encourage my fellow-believers that for many a long year have I been, day by day, praying for the work of God in Bristol,-and not only in

Bristol, but for the work of God in this neighbourhood, in this country, and throughout the world. Not a day passes without my bringing this matter before God. I should charge myself with having neglected one of the most important petitions if I were to neglect this. Of course we must first care about our own souls, next about our own particular work; but let us never be satisfied without praying for those who are working elsewhere.

The second subject for prayer is the attainment of a deeper knowledge of Holy Scripture by Christians in Great Britain and throughout the world. I was particularly delighted when I saw this as one of the points to be brought before us for prayer. It is of momentous importance that we should have a deeper acquaintance with the Holy Scriptures, because God has been pleased to reveal Himself by the Holy Scriptures. The more I am truly acquainted with them, the deeper my knowledge with regard to the revelation God has been pleased to make of Himself, the deeper my knowledge becomes of Him. Why is it important to know more of God? Because it tends to holiness, happiness, and usefulness. It tends to holiness: the more I know of God, the more I am constrained to admire Him, and to say, What a lovely, good Being He is! and especially when I see His wondrous love in Christ Jesus to such a guilty, wicked creature as I am; and therefore my heart is constrained to seek to imitate God, to seek to do something in return for His love, and to be more like God Himself. It also tends to happiness: the more we know of God, the happier we are. It was when we were in entire ignorance of God that we were without real peace or joy. When we became a little acquainted with God, our peace and joy-our true happiness, I mean-commenced; and the more we become acquainted with Him, the more truly happy we become. What will make us so exceedingly happy in heaven? It will be the fuller knowledge of God,-we shall know Him then far better than we now do. The knowledge of God also tends to our usefulness in His service here: it is impossible that I can enter into what God has done for sinners, without being constrained in return to seek to live for Him, to labour for Him. I ask myself, What can I do for Him who has bestowed upon me His choicest gifts? Hence I am constrained to labour for Him. According to the measure in which I am fully acquainted with God, do I seek to labour for Him. I cannot be idle.

Does any one ask me, What is the best way of reading the Scriptures? I may say a little about this, because in my experience in pastoral labour I have found how deeply important it is to know how to read the Scriptures; and because, after forty years' blessed experience, I can confidently recommend the plan I have adopted. In the first place, in order to have a deeper acquaintance with the Scriptures, it is absolutely needful that you

read the whole in course, regularly through,-not as some perhaps do, take the Bible, and where it opens there begin to read. If it opens on Psalm ciii., they read Psalm ciii.; if at John xiv. or Romans viii., they read John xiv. or Romans viii. By degrees the Bible opens naturally on such portions of Scripture. Let me affectionately say that it ill becomes the child of God thus to treat the Father's book; it ill becomes the disciples of the Lord Jesus thus to treat their blessed Master. Let me affectionately urge those who have not done so, to begin the Old Testament from the beginning, and the New Testament from the beginning; at one time reading in the Old, and at another time in the New Testament; keeping a mark in their Bible to show how far they have proceeded. Why is it important to do this? There is a special purpose in the arrangement of the Scriptures. They begin with the creation of the world, and close with the end of the world. As you read a book of biography or history, commencing at the beginning and reading through to the end, so should you read the revelation of God's will; and when you get to the end, begin again and again. But this is not all that is necessary. When you come to this blessed Book, the great point is to come with a deep consciousness of your own ignorance, seeking on your knees the help of God, that by His Spirit He may graciously instruct you. I remember when I thus began to read the Scriptures. I had been a student of divinity in the university of Halle, and had written many a long manuscript at the lectures of the professors of divinity; but I had not come to this blessed Book in the right spirit. At length I came to it as I had never done before. I said, The Holy Ghost is the Teacher now in the Church of Christ; the Holy Scriptures are now the rule given by God; from them I must learn His mind,-I will now prove it. I locked my door. I put my Bible on the chair. I fell down before the chair, and spent three hours prayerfully reading the word of God; and I unhesitatingly say that in those three hours I learned more than in any previous three, six, or twelve months' period of my life. This was not all. I not only increased in knowledge, but there came with that knowledge a peace and joy in the Holy Ghost of which I had known little before. Since that time, for more than forty years, I have been in the habit of regularly reading the Scriptures; and I can therefore affectionately and confidently recommend to my beloved younger fellow-disciples to read them carefully, with an humble mind, comparing Scripture with Scripture, bringing the more difficult passages to the easy ones, and letting them interpret one another. If you do not understand some portions, be not discouraged, but come again and again to God, and He will guide you by little and little, and further instruct you in the knowledge of His will. But this is not all; for with an increasing knowledge of God, obtained in a prayerful, humble way, you will receive, not something which simply fills the head, but something which exercises the heart, and cheers, comforts, and strengthens you, and will therefore be of real good to you.

We are further entreated to pray for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in the conversion of souls. None of us suppose that by this is meant that we are to pray for the Spirit now to be given to the Church of God; for we know He was given on the day of Pentecost to the Church in her collective capacity, to abide with her for ever, and has not been taken away, notwithstanding our many failings. Just as the cloudy and fiery pillar was not taken from the Israelites, notwithstanding their many provocations, so the blessed Spirit of God has not been taken away from the Church. Moreover, God has given His Spirit to the individual believer, -to all who put their trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. But though the Spirit dwells in the Church of Christ as to her collective capacity, and in the individual believer, nevertheless it is fitting and suitable and right on the part of the children of God, that they should ask God again and again, and with great earnestness, that He would work mightily by His Spirit. We depend entirely on the power of the Holy Ghost for the conversion of sinners. There might be the most mighty preacher, as to the knowledge of the Scriptures and the clearness with which he sets forth the truth; yet if the Spirit of God is not pleased to bless the word, he may preach for months, and yet there will be no blessing. Therefore all the beloved children of God-not only those who are preachers, but those who have never opened their mouth publicly to set forth the truth-should seek day by day to ask the blessing of God on the efforts made to set forth His truth. Let me affectionately ask each one of you whether you are in the habit of doing this? Let each one of us put the question to ourselves, Are we in the habit of praying day by day that God would be pleased, by the power of His Spirit, to work, through the preaching of the gospel, that whenever and wherever His word is set forth He would work? Not only on Lord's-day morning, just before we go out of our houses, is it right to do this, but day by day. On Monday we should begin with this, on Tuesday we should repeat the request, and again on Wednesday, and Thursday, and Friday, and Saturday. Oh, what blessing would come to them, if believers thus acted day by day! I don't refer to my habit boastfully, but to show it can be done, and ought to be done. It is laid on my heart thus to pray day by day. I have been doing it for many years. I have been praying, not for the conversion of souls in Bristol only, though this city I begin with first, then this neighbourhood, specially having before my mind the dear Christian brethren who go unto the dark villages around. Then I pray for the spread of the gospel throughout the land and everywhere. Here is a blessed work for every dear sister as well as brother. You are not called to preach, but here is a blessed work in which you can engage. If this were universally carried out, a mighty power of the Holy Ghost would soon be seen.

We are also come together to pray for the progress of the Reformation at home and

abroad, and for the spread of the gospel in Roman Catholic countries. When I read this, I said to myself, The first thing is, in order to progress, that it should commence in my own heart. What was the great principle of the Reformation? The Bible, and only the Bible! They would no longer have anything else. There were many other points, but this was the great outstanding one. Well, everything must be brought to the Bible. My own individual life and walk, and the work in which I am myself engaged, must be brought to the Bible; and I must ask myself, if I am honestly and sincerely to pray for the progress of the Reformation, whether it has commenced with myself. Then with regard to my family, I should be next especially anxious increasingly to bring them to the Scriptures, that their ways, lives, maxims, habits, and principles may be according to them. That is carrying out the principle of the Reformation. Then, having by God's grace attended in some little measure to this, I should seek farther and wider to extend the principle, just as a stone thrown into the water makes small circles at first, but spreads wider and wider. Let no man say, I am single handed; what can I do? If there were a hundred others working with me, I might do something. Never say this. Think of what Hezekiah accomplished single-handed, and Jehoshaphat, and Josiah, and Luther, and others, and see what they did. Oh! if we cry mightily to God, and expect great things from Him, what may not be accomplished through us? Look at our beloved Wesley, and Whitefield too, they were comparatively single-handed, and yet what great things were accomplished through their instrumentality. But there must be a right beginning,-and the right beginning is at home, with ourselves. Our own souls must first be nourished and fed and strengthened. If we aim thus to be influenced by the Bible, our influence would be sure to be felt, and would spread farther and farther,-not merely in Bristol or throughout England, but it is impossible to say how far it would be felt. Let us expect great things, and ask them of God, who delights in bestowing abundant blessings.

We are also to pray tonight for the spread of the gospel in Roman Catholic countries. Here it becomes us especially to give thanks for what God has done. There was a time when Italy was completely closed against the preaching of the gospel and circulation of the Scriptures; Spain and Austria, as well as Italy, are now opened to the gospel and the circulation of the Scriptures. It is a remarkable fact, however, that whilst Austria is open in a way it has never before been for many a long century, so that freely the Holy Scriptures may be circulated, and there is no hindrance to the preaching of the gospel there, yet with all this there is scarcely a single evangelist making use of the privilege. The Scriptures are widely circulated there, but the preaching of the gospel is as rare as in any country in the world. I would therefore particularly commend this matter to your prayers,-that God would be pleased by His Spirit to call and qualify evangelists for

proclaiming the unsearchable riches of the gospel of Christ in that empire.

We are next asked to pray for the overruling mercy of God in reference to the unscriptural designs of the Ecumenical Council. Here we should say, for our comfort, that to the blessed Lord Jesus, the great Head of the Church, is given all power in heaven and earth. He rules, He governs; and though this is not seen yet, it is not the less true that that blessed One governs the universe. So far, and no farther can men go. The wrath of men shall praise the Lord, who is able to overrule all for good, and will bring good out of evil. But it becomes us to continue in prayer; and day by day, while these prelates are sitting, we should pray that God would so work that good might come out of this council.

The last subject for prayer is, The closer union and fuller co-operation of believers in Christ, and the speedy coming of His kingdom. I was so delighted when I read this. What will help us, who believe in Christ, to be more united together? One might say, Oh, we must give up our differences. Allow me affectionately and humbly to say, I don't think so. According to my judgment, a closer union would not be brought about by this means, by giving up our own views of what we consider to be taught us by God in the Scriptures. Not thus; but the great point is to hold them in their proper place, and to let the foundation truths of our holy faith have their proper place. We have not to say, Now for this evening I will put all aside that I hold distinctively from my brethren. No! Nor do I expect this from my brethren. No! We will, by God's grace, carry out the teaching of Scripture,-Buy the truth, and sell it not. With diligence and prayerfulness, and, if necessary, great sacrifice, ought we to buy the truth; but having obtained it, for no price whatever is it to be sold, not even for our liberty or our life. But, beloved, while this is the truth, it is only one side of the truth. The other side is this The foundation truths of our holy faith are so great, so momentous, and so precious, so altogether superabounding in comparison with anything else, that if we lived more under their influence, and more valued and enjoyed them, we should be constrained to love one another, to be knit together in love. Now we know we have one and the selfsame Saviour, therefore we are most intimately united in this. By this faith in the Lord Jesus we are all introduced into one family. Through this believing the gospel, we become the children of God and members of the same heavenly family. Now if this were present to our hearts,-that we have all one Father in heaven, one Saviour, all are bought by the self-same precious blood, and baptized by the Holy Ghost into one body, that we are all walking the same road to heaven, and ere long shall reach the same home,-if this were present to our hearts, I say, then this difference or the other difference of opinion would not separate and

alienate us. Let me affectionately say, there is a blessedness and sweetness connected with really holding the membership of the body, and loving our fellow-believers, though we differ from them, that brings unspeakable joy to the soul. We should love our fellow .believers for Christ's sake, without asking to what portion of the Church of Christ they belong. I ask but one question,-Are you a disciple of the Lord Jesus? Do you love the Lord Jesus? This question must be settled. There can be no spiritual fellowship apart from this; but that being settled, no others should be raised. Let us increasingly pray to enter into what we have received in common in Christ, and that we shall soon be in the same heavenly home, and we shall of necessity be constrained to love one another.

We are also to pray for the speedy coming of His kingdom. I cannot sit down without saying a word on this point to those who do not know the Lord Jesus. When we say, Thy kingdom come, it implies that we are prepared for it. Are we prepared for it? We should be, Except a man be born again he cannot enter the kingdom of God. Ye must be born again. How is it with us? We must believe the gospel; we must have faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, or we cannot enter the kingdom. The first thing is to believe the gospel. Fellow sinner, if you are not yet on the side of Christ, have you seen you are a sinner? If not, read the first three or four chapters of the Epistle to the Romans. You may there see what you are. Pray that God may open your understanding. If you see that you are a sinner, you have to stand before God, to pass sentence on yourself, to condemn yourself. But don't stop there. Receive the gospel. Believe the gospel at once. He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life,. and every one who puts his trust in the Lord Jesus shall have forgiveness for his numberless transgressions. Should any have come to this meeting who are not yet on the side of Christ, I would affectionately say to them, Seek ye the Lord while He may be found, call ye upon Him while He is near. It may be you have come into the midst of the children of God to carry away for yourselves a blessing, as I once went into such a company and came away as a believer, and being happy in the Lord. It is my desire that you may receive Christ, and trust in Him, and the blessing will be yours.

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