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CHURCH

A PEOPLE IN

PRAYER

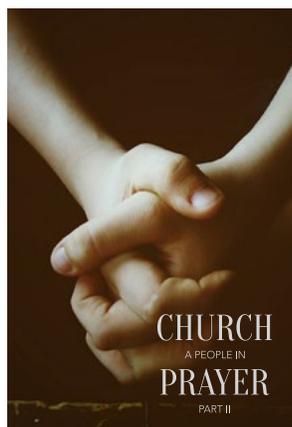
PART II

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CHURCH—A PEOPLE IN PRAYER (PART 2)

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Beneficial versus Unbeneficial Prayers

ACTS 8:14–24



▲ “Peter’s Conflict with Simon Magus” by Avanzino Nucci (1552–1629)
Oil on canvas (Avanzino Nucci, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons)

The martyrdom of Stephen—coupled with “Saul ... consenting unto his death” (Acts 8:1a)—was a turning point in the (geographic) expansion of the church. From that point onwards, “there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria, except the apostles” (Acts 8:1b). Saul, a scholarly, stringent Pharisee, considered the Christian faith as deviant from the Mosaic Law. In his zeal to upkeep the Jewish laws and customs, “he made havock of the church, entering into every house, and haling (or hauling) men and women committed *them* to prison” (Acts 8:3). The believers could not even hide in their own houses; their own homes were not a safe haven anymore. Saul, in his vicious campaign to persecute the believers, would drag them out of their houses. It was an entrapment for the believers to return home after church service. As a result, these early Christians left their homes, and “they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word” (v. 4).

New Gospel Frontier Authenticated

One such saint who was forced out of Jerusalem by persecution was Philip, one of the seven men whom the early church had chosen to take care of the administrative matters. He was enabled by God to preach, when he “went down to the city of Samaria” (v. 5). The people in Samaria were

so moved by his preaching that they “with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did” (v. 6). God authenticated his message through the miracles he was enabled to perform, including healing many people tormented by demon possession and physical deformities (cf. v. 7). Indeed, Philip’s ministry became a matter of “great joy in that city” (v. 8). The persecution of the church became (ironically) a means of transmission of spiritual joy to others—which is essentially the mission of a church. As God’s people with a calling, we are designed to be a reason for others’ joy in Christ.

The preaching of the Gospel had brought new hope to the people in Samaria. “Now when the apostles which were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John: who, when they were come down, **prayed** for them...” (vv. 14–15a). The leadership of the church in Jerusalem sent Peter and John as the apostolic representatives to Samaria to check the genuineness of the new believers there. The Holy Spirit was actually working out the progressive fulfilment of Christ’s evangelistic imperative of Acts 1:8 to the disciples: “... and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.” So, when the news came to the apostles that Samaria had received the Gospel of Christ, they wanted to ascertain the truthfulness of such a scenario. In authenticating the genuineness of the believers’ faith, it makes sense that Peter and John “prayed for them”

(v. 15a). And what did they pray? That the Samaritan believers “might receive the Holy Ghost” (v. 15b). This alludes to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit that resulted in the speaking of tongues, and the salvation of 3,000 men on the day of Pentecost (cf. Acts 2). The reason for praying for the Holy Spirit’s special manifestation was, first of all, that they may be sure that the Samaritan believers are one with them in the body of Christ.

Various Aspects of Beneficial Prayers

To authenticate the faith of all those who are truly saved is an important aspect of beneficial prayers that we are to offer before God. Our prayers as a church must be focused on the Holy Spirit’s working in fellow believers, so that we can be manifested as a united body of Christ. Being of differing abilities and gifts, we need to pray for the working of the Holy Spirit in the life of God’s people to show evidence of this oneness in Christ (cf. Romans 12:4-6a; 1 Corinthians 12:12-13). Christian unity is a spiritual unity that is not merely proven by some external expressions of faith. True, faith will be accompanied by works (cf. James 2:22), but not all works that are done in the name of faith are genuine Spirit-driven work. People can imitate; but we will know whether they are counterfeit or not when we pray to the Lord. In the corporate praying of genuine believers, there is a mutual acknowledgment of God’s redeeming love at work in the hearts and lives of people who are joined to Christ. Just as the early church

leaders could not go further without praying for the Holy Spirit Himself to give evidence of spiritual unity among the Samaritan believers, the church today must do the same. Even when people say they believe and go through baptism, the church shouldn’t cease praying for them. Baptism (certainly a sign and seal of one’s faith) is by itself not evidence enough. The church must be in continual prayer that those baptized believers will then be enabled by the Spirit to produce genuine works as fruit of their genuine faith (cf. James 2:20).

Beseeking the Spirit’s empowerment and equipping of all believers is yet another aspect of beneficial prayers. Now, since nobody believes in Christ without the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit (cf. John 3:5), the question is, why did the apostles pray that the Samaritan believers might receive the Holy Ghost, as though they hadn’t received the Holy Ghost? The apostles were actually praying for the Holy Spirit’s manifestation (just as it happened in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost) upon them. Such evidencing of the outworking of the Spirit’s work would not only cause these brethren to be

Faith will be accompanied with works, but not all works that are done in the name of faith are genuine Spirit-driven work.

recognised as genuine believers, it would also stand them in good stead to work together with the apostles. For to work together, they need the Spirit’s equipping. The implication is clear. As a church, it must be our ardent prayer that the saints be equipped by the Holy Spirit to serve the Lord in the various ministries. The church must pray for the Spirit’s working in the believers to produce those qualities for them to take on the important roles in church. That is characteristic of a beneficial prayer. God strengthening His people within the church is also the perspective of Paul’s own (beneficial) prayer for the Ephesian church: “That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man” (Ephesians 3:16).

A further aspect of beneficial prayers is the granting of recognition and authority to deal with sins of people who try to abuse the spiritual power that God gives to the church. That’s how the apostle Peter dealt with Simon, a magician-turned-professing believer (vv. 9, 13). Now, “when Simon saw that through laying on of the apostles’ hands the Holy Ghost was given, he offered them money, saying, Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Ghost” (vv. 18-19). What did Peter say to him? “Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money” (v. 20)! Ministry has nothing to do with money. Nobody should enter the church work for money’s sake, nor try to buy the leadership or ministry of the church by offering material things in return. That’s called

“simony” (this word is coined from this text)—it means the buying of church appointments or offices with money. No one with impure hearts and unclean hands can touch the work of God. To confront this sort of totally irreverent, unholy attitude towards the ministry, we have to be praying people, like Peter and John. Truly, being bold to deal with blatant abuse of church ministry (which defies the glory of God) is honed from constant engagement in beneficial prayers.

Beware of Unbeneficial Prayers

Every true church is a spiritual battleground. God’s Word clearly tells us that the devil will lurk around and infiltrate. There will be ravenous wolves who try to come into the church. One such character was Simon. Simon was all obsessed with miracles. In fact, he himself had “used sorcery, and bewitched the people of Samaria, giving out that himself was some great one” (v. 9b). He had been making a name (and most likely money) for himself through sorcery and all kinds of supernatural deeds he could do in a demonic way, so much so that to him “they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, This man is the great power of God” (v. 10). Though “Simon himself believed also”, it was a professing belief in the wondrous power behind “the miracles and signs which were done” by Philip (v. 13). He really wanted to perform those powerful, spiritual manifestations, and was more than

AS A CHURCH, IT MUST BE OUR ARDENT PRAYER THAT THE SAINTS BE EQUIPPED BY THE HOLY SPIRIT TO SERVE THE LORD IN VARIOUS MINISTRIES.

willing to purchase with money the power of God, if he could. He was all concerned about wielding power and becoming famous. This elicited a powerful rebuke from Peter: “Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter: for thy heart is not right in the sight of God. Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee. For I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and *in* the bond of iniquity” (vv. 21-23)!

Interestingly, look at Simon’s response: “Pray ye to the Lord for me, that none of these things which ye have spoken come upon me” (v. 24). Oh, that sounded very spiritual, didn’t it? Simon did not get angry with Peter; instead he struck a dubiously genteel attitude. Yet, for all his suave mannerisms, he came across as insincere and feigned. He did not confess that he had sinned, nor show remorse for his blasphemous proposition. Instead of taking personal responsibility for his sin by crying out to the Lord for mercy and forgiveness, he pushed that responsibility to Peter by requesting Peter to pray. Such request is tantamount to offering up unbeneficial prayers! Dear brethren, when you seek spiritual power and

vain glory, you will pray with self-glory in your heart. When you rely on your merit and contributions in carrying out your ministry, you will not give glory to God in your praying. Such constitute unbeneficial prayers, which are an abomination to God!

Incidentally, we are not told whether Simon repented, or whether he continued with the church. The fact that nothing more is said about him subsequently seems to hint that there was no drastic change in his life and convictions. His interest was never spiritual, but merely professional and self-aggrandising. His deferring to pray when urged by Peter to do so betrayed his lack of accountability to own up to his sins. Such lack of accountability is showed up in the Pharisee’s hypocritical prayer in Jesus’ parable: “God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men *are* ... or even as this publican” (Luke 18:11). God’s verdict on such an unbeneficial prayer: that man did not go away “justified” (Luke 18:14). Brethren, if we have such pharisaical attitude in our praying, we will not be able to see nor be accountable for our own sins. And God will never bless such unbeneficial prayers—He will reject them outright! Beware of unbeneficial prayers! ■

God’s Purpose Manifested

THROUGH Prayer

ACTS 9:1–17

In Acts 9, we read of one of the great persecutors of the church being transformed by the risen Lord Jesus Christ. Not only was Saul of Tarsus soundly converted, the Lord also gave him further direction as to his future work. And here’s where we see prayer playing an important part in manifesting God’s sovereign purposes in the turning of a vehement persecutor into a zealous preacher.

Fierce Persecutor Turned Praying Man

Saul was a very determined enemy of the Christian church. Realising that the Christian Gospel had spread beyond Samaria and Galilee, into Damascus (Syria), Saul was extremely determined to stop this “deviant” growth. He had contrived to gather all the necessary documents from the high priest to go up north (from Jerusalem) to Damascus, and enter every synagogue to “flush out” Christians in the Jewish community there. “And Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against

the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest, and desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues, that if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem” (vv. 1-2). Wielding all the authority to bring Christians bound to Jerusalem, he really caused the disciples (even leaders like Ananias) to be afraid of him (cf. v. 13).

Yet, Jesus, the Shepherd of His flock, had no problem stopping this “predator” dead in his tracks. “And as [Saul] journeyed, he came near Damascus: and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven: and he fell to the earth” (vv. 3-4a). Stunned and knocked over onto the ground by this powerful intervention from heaven, even the Lord Jesus’ glorious appearance (cf. v. 17), this hitherto persecutor of the church suddenly became a praying man. “And he said, Who art thou, Lord?” (v. 5a). Jesus answered him specifically, “I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks” (v. 5b). Jesus was in effect saying that Saul was hurting himself by going against an omnipotent God with his persecution agenda. In complete



▲ "The Conversion of Saint Paul" by Caravaggio (1571–1610)
Oil on cypress wood (Caravaggio, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons)

humiliation and with a frightened heart (without any more opposition), Saul, "trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" (v. 6a). Incidentally, here is another prayer of Saul, in the form of a specific question. The Lord answered him clearly and specifically: "Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do" (v. 6b).

Lord, What Wilt Thou Have Me to Do?

Prayer is a time when we can ask specific questions that trouble us.

We must learn to pray, not in general but in specific terms. Besides confessions, thanksgiving, praises and general prayer requests, prayer also entails asking necessary questions that your soul needs answers to. Such are questions asked out of reverence, respect, love and affection, not asked in rebellion and defiance. Be specific: "Lord, what will Thou have me to do?" That should be the question of every Christian. What will the Lord want me to do—as a husband or wife, father or mother, as a pastor, elder, deacon, preacher, church member, etc.? Ask those questions that really matter, and you'll find that prayer opens your minds to the great purposes of God. Indeed, "as it is written,

Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him" (1 Corinthians 2:9). When specific requests are made, specific answers will be given. "Ask, and it shall be given you" (Matthew 7:7a).

In Saul's case, we know from his recount in Acts 26:16-18, that the Lord did specifically answer him that he would be an apostle to the Gentiles, "unto whom now I send thee, to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me."

(vv.17a-18). Truly, prayer puts us on the right course to fulfil the purposes of God concerning us. As we stand together as members of the body of Christ, all of our individual purposes will come together in fulfilment of His grand, ultimate purpose. But each member must pray, "Lord, what will Thou have me to do?" A church, where members are all after their own ideas and selfish purposes, will be a listless church, without purpose, power and fruitfulness. There must be mutual edification and interdependence in our fulfilling of various specific duties in the body of Christ. Such interdependence is illustrated by how the Lord took care of Saul through a man called Ananias. "And there was a certain disciple at Damascus, named Ananias; and to him said the Lord in a vision..." (v. 10).

Prayer is Yielding to God's Direction

In the aftermath of the blinded Saul being led to wait at a house in the city, we notice the Lord had in the meantime prompted a leading believer (Ananias) in Damascus to seek out Saul and render the spiritual help he needed. Ananias must have been a man who maintained close communion with God through his regular times of prayer to God. On one such prayer occasion, God told him in a vision to go to a specific address to minister to the waiting and praying Saul (cf. vv. 11-12). The wonderful thing about Ananias is that in his communion with God, he was ever available to do what God wanted, even though he was a bit taken aback

when given the details about his task (cf. vv. 13-14). Sadly, the same cannot be said of many Christians today. They pray with a selfish agenda, often betraying their lack of complete consecration to God. How about us? Do not let our own lofty aspirations nor our own desires hinder us from yielding to God. Though prayer is never a channel for us to dictate our ideas to God, we may nonetheless pour out our fears, doubts, hesitations humbly in submission to God's will, knowing that He will strengthen us. Certainly, Ananias, in articulating his apprehension about Saul, was not trying to inform God what He didn't know about Saul. When in prayer we utter anything at all about our difficulties, fears or doubts, we are saying, "Here am I, Lord, with all my troubles, confusion, fears, but still use me since You have chosen me."

Prayer is yielding ourselves to God—"Here am I; send me" (cf. Isaiah 6:8b). If you would pray specifically about your concerns and fears (not in defiance, but in complete surrender), you will be directed to do that which you never imagine you could. That's why prayer opens our minds to God's great purposes, even to bring God's sheep to His church, like in Ananias' case. Ananias prayed for Saul as the Lord directed him. (v. 17). Saul then "straightway ... preached Christ in the synagogues" (v. 20). Because he was an Old Testament scholar, he already knew the Scriptural prophecies and what passages referred to the Messiah. And suddenly he could "connect all the dots"! Being illumined to see Jesus of Nazareth, whom he had previously hated, as the Messiah, he could stand in the synagogue

and exposit the Old Testament Scriptures to prove that Jesus is the Son of God (cf. v. 22). That first preaching stint of Saul in Damascus was just the beginning of God's great purposes (for the church) to come. Undeniably, the conversion and commission of Saul paved the way for the Christian witness to be taken beyond Judaea and Samaria—to Asia Minor, Europe (through his missionary journeys)—even “unto the uttermost part of the earth” (cf. Acts 1:8)! Such amazing accomplishment of God's great purposes—from a small beginning—all hinged on a life-changing prayer, “Lord, what will Thou have me to do?”

Conclusion

What power and direction the praying Ananias and the praying Saul brought to the work of God in the church! Dear brethren, as God's people, we should at no time doubt that the Lord would ever direct us as our Shepherd. Jesus after all has said, “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me” (John 10:27). Christians are supposed to constantly expect God's guidance. Hence, Saul's heartfelt prayer (request) is worthy of emulation: “Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?” If you would pray such a prayer, and in the process ask specific questions and make your requests known to God (even confessing your fears and doubts), the Lord would manifest to you His purposes that far exceed your mind to conceive. ■

PRAYER IN

Alignment WITH God's Will

ACTS 9:36–42

The apostle Peter's gospel campaign (in the wake of persecution against the church at Jerusalem) had led him from Jerusalem to a place called Lydda. As “Peter passed throughout all *quarters*, he came down also to the saints which dwelt at Lydda (about 23 miles northwest of Jerusalem)” (Acts 9:32). God used him to preach the Word and perform powerful miracles of healing, making him a channel of blessing. “And all that dwelt at Lydda ... turned to the Lord” (v. 35). What a powerful and fruitful ministry Peter was having! Not only was he powerful in his preaching and healing ministries, he was also a mighty man of prayer, as evidenced in the episode of the raising of Tabitha to life.

Miracle Anticipated

“Now there was at Joppa (a nearby town 12 miles northwest of Lydda) a certain disciple named Tabitha, which by interpretation is called Dorcas: this woman was full of good works and almsdeeds which she did” (v. 36). Tabitha was a woman who cared for the needy in the church, in particular she was moved to take care of the widows in the church in Joppa. That was why upon her death,

when Peter was come, “all the widows stood by him weeping, and shewing the coats and garments which Dorcas made, while she was with them” (v. 39). Tabitha, though not asked by the church to do so, exerted herself to minister to the needy because the Lord had given her eyes to see their needs. Truly, if only every Christian were like Tabitha, doing his part, hundreds of needs in the church could be taken care of. What is needed is a heart of love—may God raise up more “Tabithas” in the church!

This endearing woman must have really touched the hearts of the people of Joppa, for they felt an acute sense of loss when she suddenly fell sick and died. Saddened by her death, the disciples, upon hearing that Peter was in the nearby town of Lydda, “sent unto him two men, desiring *him* that he would not delay to come to them” (v. 38), apparently hoping that he could somehow miraculously restore her to life. And that was what happened...

Prayer Precedes Miracle

It is instructive to note that Peter's prayer was the essential feature that led to Tabitha's restoration to life. “But Peter put them all forth, and kneeled down, and **prayed**; and turning *him* to the body said, Tabitha, arise. And she opened her eyes: and when she saw Peter, she sat up” (v. 40). Notwithstanding the lack of details about Peter's offer of prayer, we can glean a couple of learning points from this prayer occasion, which culminated in a display of divine

empowerment through the miracle that brought Tabitha back from death.

Firstly, it is noteworthy that Peter asked everybody to go out, leaving only him and the dead body alone. How long he prayed, we are not told. He was there kneeling before God, like his Lord Jesus did on many occasions in His earthly ministry, withdrawn from the hustle of the crowd (and even from the unintentionally distracting disciples). Dear brethren, do you know there is a great need for the leaders of the church to find their “quiet time” of prayer? All the more so when the burdens of the ministry grow heavier, and the spiritual estate of church members' souls are at stake. It is scripturally obvious that Peter was not worried for Dorcas who died, knowing that she would be safe in the arms of Jesus her Saviour. If anything, he was burdened for the needs of the people in the church in Joppa who, in the remaining days of their sojourning on earth, needed the presence and ministering of matured, fervent saints like Tabitha. There alone on his knees, Peter prayed.

Secondly, such crucial moment of prayer would have afforded Peter with a needful opportunity to draw his thoughts Godward. It would have affirmed his trust in God's sovereignty as he sought to address God as One who knows every present situation, with its accompanying difficult circumstances. There is a God who knows all things, including every tense and perplexing situation that could arise in the church. In taking time to pray, he would also have been reminded that because God had pre-ordained all things with a purpose,



▲ “Saint Peter Raises Tabitha” by Fabrizio Santafede (1560–1623/8)
On display at Pio Monte della Misericordia
Oil on canvas (Fabrizio Santafede, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons)

this matter, turned to the body and said, “Tabitha, arise.” When she opened her eyes and sat up, Peter “gave her *his* hand, and lifted her up, and when he had called the saints and widows, presented her alive” (v. 41). The result was: this miracle “was known throughout all Joppa; and many believed in the Lord” (v. 42).

Prayer Submits Purposes to God’s Will

Many believed in the Lord—that seems to be the main intended purpose of God in effecting this astounding miracle of raising Tabitha to life through Peter. Though we don’t really know whether Peter prayed that

God should raise this woman from her deadness, he did pray—to know God’s will. Spiritual awakening and revival is certainly in line with God’s will. It was not given to all the believers of the early church to perform miracles. If you study Scripture carefully, all the miracles were done mainly by the apostles and by those chosen of God to work along with the apostles [such as Philip the evangelist, who had preached Christ in Samaria with authenticating miracles and signs (cf. Acts 8:5-8)]. Though there were disciples in Joppa, none of them was called upon to perform any healing or

His servants could yield to His good purposes in every situation, whether in life or in death. The Lord, “which made heaven and earth” (Psalm 121:2) and “from whence cometh [the saint’s] help” (Psalm 121:1), is also the One “by him all things consist” (Colossians 1:17). More than ever, Peter would have come to the recognition that God directs the steps of all “to do whatsoever [His] hand and [His] counsel determined before to be done” (Acts 4:28).

After the vigil of prayer, Peter, having been convicted of God’s will in

work any miracle. They sent two men instead to entreat the apostle Peter (lodging at nearby Lydda) to come to their aid. What is striking was that Peter did not presume he had the power to do whatever he wanted; he submitted himself in prayer (alone) first. As soon as he finished his prayer, calling upon the all-knowing God, who is the Governor of the entire universe and who alone can give power to perform miracles, he then gave the command, “Tabitha, arise.”

Being an apostle, Peter was given authenticating sign miracles to accompany his preaching. But he did not take that special power to perform sign miracles as his birthright, nor to show off his power. Even though he had the power, he humbly knelt in prayer to ask God for His direction. Truly, every leader must remember this Scriptural principle: our God-given gift is not to be abused in a self-driven way, nor to make us act in extraordinary pride. Leaders must be reminded to submit to God in prayer. A leader who prays will experience

great results that God has planned. It is on our knees that we accomplish great things for God’s kingdom. Great answers come to those who humbly call upon the Lord. Whether God intervenes supernaturally or uses mundane, normal activities or things to accomplish His will, our role is to seek God’s will in prayer.

Conclusion

Dear brethren, if we want to be part of God’s grand purpose and providential work on this earth during our lifetime, one thing is needful. We must humbly pray, acknowledging that we can do nothing without Him, but only when God works mightily through us. We thus do well to pray in alignment with God’s will, trusting that God, who “is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us” (Ephesians 3:20), will lead us to greater victories and spiritual accomplishments, for His glory. Amen. ■

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Events Divinely Orchestrated Through Prayer

ACTS 10:1–24



▲ “Peter Baptizing the Centurion Cornelius” by Francesco Trevisani (1656–1746)
Oil on canvas (Image taken from <https://images1.bonhams.com/image?src=images/live/2017-10/19/24698557-17-1.jpg&width=960>)

The episode concerning the conversion of Cornelius (a Roman centurion) is a pivotal and singularly significant event in the evangelistic outreach of the New Testament church, no doubt sovereignly directed by the Holy Spirit. It made ready for the reception of Gentile believers into the Gospel fold. “And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd”, Jesus had already foretold (John 10:16). Jesus would bring and gather Gentile believers through the hearing of His voice (via the Gospel preached by His apostles), that His church would comprise both Jewish and Gentile believers.

It is significant to note that this divine acceptance of non-Jews, which reflected “the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek (i.e. Gentile)” (Romans 1:16b),

was brought about by a convergence of events, which were occasioned by much prayer behind the scenes. In Acts 10, we have that pulsating story, with each scene orchestrated by the Holy Spirit (to perfect timing)—in response to prayer. Indeed, the reference to prayer stands out by virtue of its repetition. Seven times the idea of prayer is reflected—four instances referring to Cornelius (vv. 2, 4, 30, 31), twice to Peter (vv. 9, 14), once to the believing Gentiles upon acceptance of the Gospel (v. 46).

Divine Preparation of a Devout Roman through Prayer

Cornelius was a centurion of the band stationed in Caesarea, “a devout man, and one that feared God with all his house, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God alway” (v. 2). This Roman centurion was unique in that he was God-fearing—not towards his own idol or a Roman deity, but towards the God of Israel. Even though he was still unconverted, he demonstrated an affinity towards the things of the God of Israel. Apparently, the LORD was working upon his heart; by turning to Jehovah of Israel, his dark soul was leaving the pagan religion of his ancestors. He outwardly expressed his affection for the God of Israel, and showed special kindness towards the Jewish people, giving them “much alms”. Moreover, every one of them in his house was influenced by his devoutness (v. 2a). Though a servant of Caesar of Rome (who demanded that people worship

him, and who hated Jesus’ name), this God-fearing centurion was engaging in all sorts of spiritual activities, including praying continually—for he “prayed to God alway” (v. 2c)!

Interestingly, on one such regular prayer occasion, he “saw in a vision ... an angel of God coming in to him ...” (v. 3). In that vision, the angel told him that God had taken note of his prayers and alms, which “are come up for a memorial before God” (v. 4b). What an astounding statement! Evidently, God had been preparing this man’s heart to receive the Gospel of salvation, which he would have the opportunity to hear upon the arrival of God’s apostle to his house. This would hinge on Cornelius “send[ing] men to Joppa, and call[ing] for one Simon, whose surname is Peter” (v. 5), whereupon “he shall tell thee what thou oughtest to do” (v. 6b). What does it all tell us? As long as the Lord tarries, there are still a lot of unsaved elect out there (even people who we thought will never turn to God) desperately waiting for Christ and His message to be heard. If God would save Cornelius, a captain of the ruthless Roman army, He could save any heathen.

Divine Correction of Prejudice through Prayer

The church exists for the fulfilment of God’s evangelistic plan (cf. Acts 1:8)—even to reach the “unlovable” with the Gospel. We must take down “walls” that are raised by our own fears and doubts, suspicion and lack of faith.

Pessimism and our blindness must go. Even the apostle Peter had his deeply entrenched prejudices, as highlighted by the Acts 10 account. He couldn't believe that the God of Israel would save the Gentiles. But things would change, as we see how the Lord dealt with Peter. Noteworthy, all these were accompanied by the spiritual activity of prayer. When God works to establish His kingdom, and to bring people mightily into His salvific fold, an increase in the spirit of prayer will somehow be evident.

Now, when Cornelius, in accordance with the angelic word, sent men to Joppa to invite Peter, we read that as they “drew nigh unto the city, Peter went up upon the housetop to pray about the sixth hour (i.e. 12 noon)” (v. 9). Why would anyone like to go to the rooftop at noon (under the midday sun) to pray? Not unless one likes solitude, being alone on the rooftop, with nobody to disturb. There could be no better secret place or “closet” for prayer. While praying, Peter felt an acute hunger (v. 10), apparently created by God at that moment, which was more than just a physical hunger. God was preparing him for a spiritual revelation. The heaven opened, and a certain vessel (wherein were contained all sorts of ceremonially unclean animals) descended unto him, with an accompanying voice urging him to “kill, and eat” (vv. 11-13). But Peter protested, “Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten any thing that is common or unclean” (v. 14). “And the voice spake unto him again the second time, What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common” (v. 15). Through his praying, Peter had this unusual opportunity to be instructed by God—

three times (cf. v. 16)—in a symbolic and yet powerful way!

While Peter pondered on this vision, at the same time, the men sent from Cornelius (having made enquiry for Simon's house) had stood before the gate, asking for Peter (vv. 17-18). Traditionally, these Gentiles were people whom the Jews would never have a meal nor any fellowship with. Yet, the Spirit prompted Peter to meet and welcome them unreservedly (vv. 19-20). In other words, God had indicated to him that he should not discriminate against any man because of his race. Christians should not call any man “common or unclean”. Though initially having difficulty deciphering the vision that came to him three times, the meaning suddenly dawned upon him. Peter knew God wanted him to receive and even reach out to these seeking Gentiles (cf. vv. 28-29).

Divine Blessing Realised through Prayer

Like Peter, perplexing scenarios and seemingly unfathomable issues may confront us. But if we are ever willing to do God's will, He will ultimately show us the path though He may have to lead us through dark valleys beforehand. Prayer is what puts us in the right frame of mind and disposition when God leads us through the providential unfolding of event after event. The prompting of the Holy Spirit may come through the messages that God gives to you in your devotion,

or through the sermon that you listen to in the church service. Allow God to lead you through His Word, and let Jesus the Saviour be your Pilot; you are not the captain of your soul. Peter's immediate obedience to the Spirit's bidding is a case in point. It paved the way for divine blessing to be realised. Thus, when he “went down to the men which were sent unto him from Cornelius; and said, Behold, I am he whom ye seek: what is the cause wherefore ye are come?” (v. 21), it set in motion a chain of events that eventually saw him being ushered into Cornelius' house in Caesarea, where “Cornelius waited ... together (with) his kinsmen and near friends” (v. 24b).

Meanwhile, how do you think Cornelius waited? It must have been with prayer. Though he was certainly excited, we don't find him pacing up and down anxiously. He waited in prayer and with great anticipation, despite having many unanswered questions about the unknown tomorrows. Indeed, blessed is the person who acknowledges his nothingness and waits upon the Lord. As Peter went in to Cornelius' house, conversing with him, he “found many that were come together” (v. 27b), awaiting to hear the Gospel of Jesus Christ from his mouth! It reminded him of the symbolic meaning of that sheet which came down from heaven with all kinds of animals in it. For his first words to them tell of this acknowledgment: “And he said unto them, Ye know how that it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to keep company, or come unto one of another nation; but God hath shewed me that I should not call any man common or unclean” (v. 28). As soon

as he entered the centurion's house, the ultimate meaning of his thrice-given vision began to grip him... He then proceeded to share the Gospel message with the eager, expectant audience, resulting in the conversion of Cornelius and his household (vv. 44-45). Truly, when divine blessing of salvation fell upon the souls of the Gentile converts that day, Peter knew, beyond a doubt, that God makes no distinction between Jews and Gentiles.

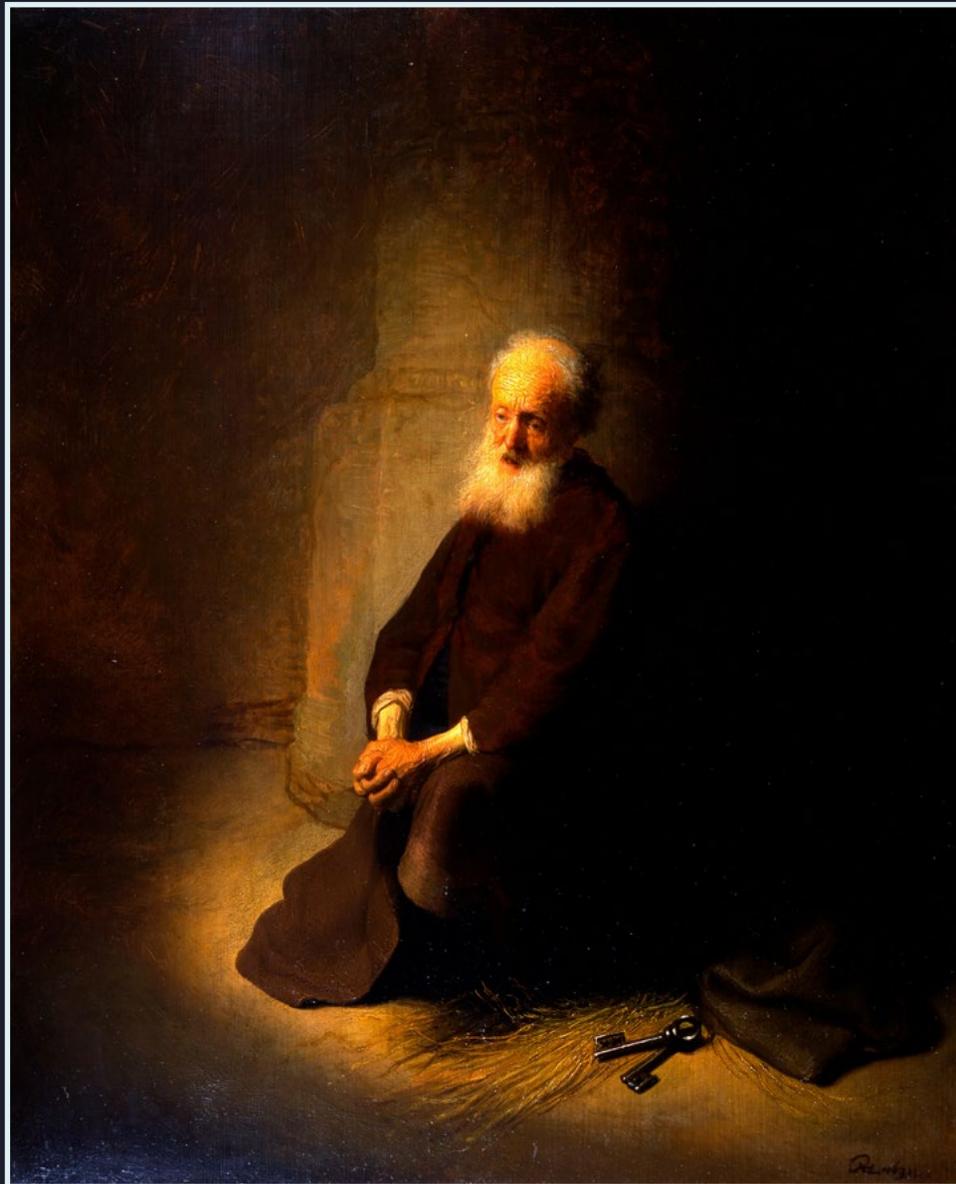
Conclusion

This gripping, heartwarming episode of Cornelius' conversion came to pass, through the Holy Spirit's orchestrating of events when men prayerfully sought God. That's what we see in Cornelius, a man who had been worked upon by God's sovereignty, preparing himself in devoutness and prayer. That's what we also see in Peter on his gospel trail, which is an unstoppable mission of Christian witness “both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth” (Acts 1:8b). Likewise, when prayer exudes from our heart, especially prayer after the good counsel of God's Word, we will never miss what God has designated. One such prayer that God's people should earnestly cry out is this: “The harvest truly is great, but the labourers are few: pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he would send forth labourers into his harvest” (Luke 10:2). ■



Unceasing Prayer IN Times of Peril

ACTS 12:1-5



▲ “St. Peter in Prison (The Apostle Peter Kneeling)” by Rembrandt (1606–1669)
Oil on panel (Rembrandt, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons)

Rembrandt chooses to display Peter as an old man with a lined face and the rough hands of a fisherman. Peter is identified by the keys next to him. They symbolize the keys of the Kingdom in Heaven that Christ had given him.

Right at the outset, the early church was already put under much pressure and targeted for hostile treatment by the unbelieving world. “If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before *it hated you*” (John 15:18), Jesus had declared. In other words, if the world is provoked by the holy, impeccable demands of Christ’s words, it will also detest those who promote God’s truths. Not only was the church in Jerusalem made to scatter because of persecution, much effort was also exerted to cast Christians into prison. But none of these setbacks prevented the Gospel’s advancement. By the Holy Spirit’s directing and working in the hearts of the early Christians, the Gospel conquest continued throughout Judea, Samaria and beyond.

But in Acts 12, a different challenging situation was forced upon the church, with “certain (i.e. the prominent leaders) of the church” (v.1b) being afflicted by the ruler of the land. The biblical response of the church, as it has always been, was prayer! Let us learn something about the early church’s fervent prayers, especially in times of peril.

Afflicted for the Gospel’s Sake

In the church, preachers of God’s Word (such as the apostles in the first century) are the ones who face the brunt of contempt and hostilities thrown at the church. In Acts 12, we see Herod the king very focused on whom he wanted to silence. He was extremely unhappy with the

preachers of the Gospel, because he feared becoming a secondary figure to Christ of the Gospel, and thereby losing his own political clout built up over the years. Besides, in order to remain in his power without any uprising, he knew he needed the support of the Jews. So, for his own self-serving political advantage, he wanted to appease the Jewish religious leadership by targeting certain prominent individuals in the Jerusalem church. “Now about that time Herod the king stretched forth *his hands* to vex certain of the church. And he killed James the brother of John with the sword” (vv. 1-2). Not satisfied, Herod went further and arrested Peter also, hoping to win for himself more Jewish favour—“And because he saw it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to take Peter also” (v. 3).

It is very interesting to note the manner in which Herod made sure Peter would be kept in maximum security under arrest. He “delivered *him* to four quaternions (i.e. bands of 4) of soldiers to keep him” (v. 4b). (That means 4 bands of 4, making it 16 soldiers.) Such was the close watch put upon Peter, who was treated like a state terrorist! Herod had intended “after Easter (actually a reference to Passover) to bring him forth to the people” (v. 4c). Apparently, the intention was to keep Peter in the prison until the Passover festivities were over, when the Jewish leaders were more ready to focus on other issues at hand. Clearly, Herod’s motivation was to appease them by silencing these so-called “troublemakers” of the Jewish religion; so he was actually making a

political point by standing against the church. In that regard, Herod was a real threat to the church!

Christians do well to remember they are never promised a friendly world. Jesus had warned, “In the world ye shall have tribulation” (John 16:33). Scripture reminds us that we are sent out like sheep among the wolves—that’s how the church is treated in this world. Alas, whenever you see so-called churches suddenly becoming popular and accepted by the world, please suspect something may be wrong with that church! When a church is truly standing for Christ, there will be much persecution and hostility that it has to put up with. “Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you” (1 John 3:13). The sad fact is that modern churches have become worldly, feeling very comfortable in and with the world. There is no more distinction between the church and the world, unlike the early church, which lived in constant peril on this earth. A probing question: How many of us really want to be in the service of God, if our lives are threatened?

Sustained by Prayer for the Gospel’s Sake

In the face of belligerent pressure confronting the early church (with nowhere else to turn to), “prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him (Peter)” (v. 5b). There are some important truths to take note about the effective prayers of the early church in such times of peril.

First of all, they cultivated **fervent** prayers. Amidst all the tremendous setbacks and hostilities, prayer is a weapon that can cut a path for you to go forward to advance the kingdom of God. Be fervent in prayer—put away any lackadaisical, apathetic, dispassionate attitude in prayer. Be enthusiastic in your approach to prayer, not merely following a liturgical routine in prayer. Luke described their prayer in this manner—“prayer was made ...” (v. 5b). What do we mean by prayer “was made”? There was a passion within the heart of these people to pray. Notwithstanding all sorts of sombre and distressing emotions simultaneously pressing upon them (to detract from their firm stand for Christ), there was an intense, resolute drive towards prayer. That’s what drives the early church on in the midst of tribulations—“prayer was made ... of the church unto God ...”. Oh, how we ought to be a people of fervent prayer, like the early church!

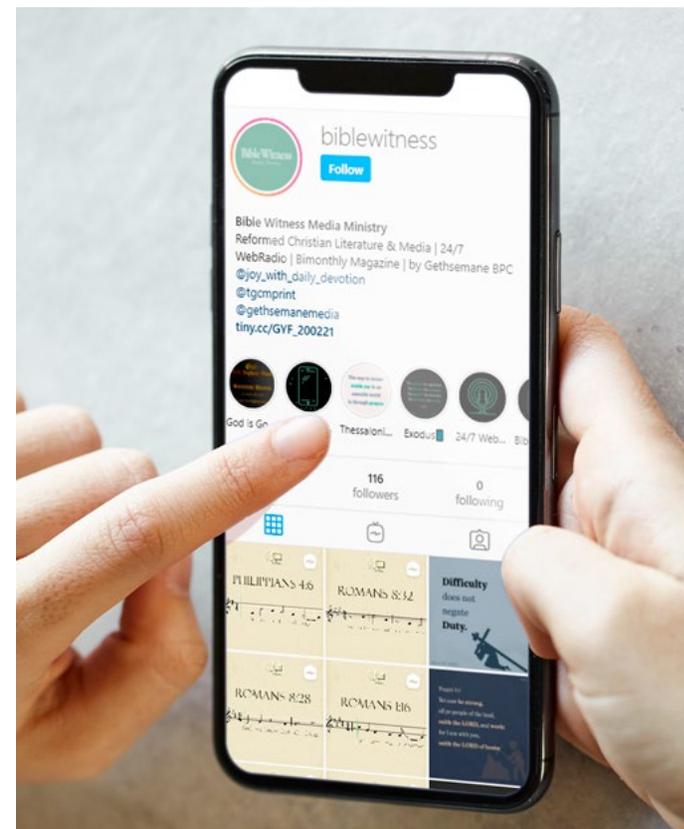
Their prayers were also **continuous**. Prayer was made “without ceasing” (v. 5b). The Greek verbal form used here is in the Greek imperfect tense, which denotes a continuing action in the past—not a once-and-for-all, but a continuous action. In other words, they continued to pray, almost like keeping up a round-the-clock vigil. It gives the idea that they were totally absorbed in the spiritual exercise of prayer, thanksgiving, praise, intercession, affirmation, and confession. When prayer is fervent and continuous, you can imagine the kind of attitude, aspirations, exertions their souls are going through during the time of

prayer. It is not a routine, ritualistic prayer, but passionate, enthusiastic prayer that brings everything out of the soul before God.

Moreover, their prayers were very **focused**. Prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God “for him” (v. 5b)—that is, prayer was offered on behalf of, for the sake of Peter, particularly. Can you imagine a church praying for one particular item all through the night on a continual basis? In a similar vein, have you ever wondered how the early church managed to be engaged in prayer for such a length of time? Among other things, they would probably be stirred to recollect what God has done for His people in the past—how He had delivered Moses from the hand of the Egyptians, David from the Philistines, Daniel from the lion’s den, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego from the fiery furnace, Jeremiah from the dungeon, etc. In their praying, they called on

God and gave Him glory as the God who guided (and even delivered) His people through the ages. They saw their present need in the light of the history of God’s work in the Scriptures. In that sense, the entire Bible could well become their prayer content!

Likewise, that’s how our minds can be saturated with the greatness of God when we pray. When the entire Bible becomes the source material of our prayer content, comfort can fill us (even in perilous times) and courage can take hold of us (like the saints of old, who stood for God) in the face of extreme hostility. If we would understand the power and necessity of prayer in the church, and will give ourselves to *fervent, continuous, focused* prayers, our church can rise above all obstacles and hostilities for the Gospel’s sake, and become very effective in the days to come. May God give us the grace to pray—unceasingly, even in times of peril. ■



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BIBLE TRIVIA—NUMBERS 22

SARAH YONG

Read the respective verses in the Bible passage, and then circle the correct word (from those given in the brackets) to complete each of the statements below.

1. After defeating the Amorites, the children of Israel moved on and pitched in the plains of [Midian / Moab] near Jericho. (v. 1)
2. Balak, the king of Moab, and his people were very [afraid / ashamed] and distressed because of all they had witnessed. (v. 3)
3. The king sent messengers unto Balaam the prophet, and requested for him to [check / curse] the people of Israel. (v. 6)
4. God said unto [Balak / Balaam], “Thou shalt not go with them; thou shalt not curse the people: for they are blessed.” (v. 12)

5. When Balak heard about Balaam’s refusal to come, he sent more princes unto him with promises of very great [honour / health]. (v. 17)
6. God came unto Balaam at [night / noon] and told him he could go with the men, but speak only according to God’s leading. (v. 20)
7. While Balaam was riding his ass on the way to Moab, the angel of the LORD stood in the way, with His [shield / sword] in His hand. (v. 23)
8. The ass saw the angel and turned aside into a [field / forest], and Balaam hit the ass to redirect her back to her path. (v. 23)
9. Subsequently, when the angel of the LORD stood in a path of the vineyards, the ass thrust herself unto the wall and crushed Balaam’s [finger / foot]. (v. 25)
10. Next, the angel of the LORD stood in a narrow place, such that the ass could not turn to either side but fell down, so Balaam hit it with a [staff / sword]. (v. 27)
11. After the LORD had caused the ass to speak to Balaam, and opened his [ears / eyes] to see the angel of the LORD, Balaam bowed down and fell flat on his face. (v. 31)
12. When Balaam reached Moab, he told Balak that he could only speak the words that God would put in his [mind / mouth]. (v. 38)

Answers to Bible Trivia—Numbers 21:10–35 (Vol. 21, Iss. 2, p. 28)

1) pitched, 2) coasts, 3) well, 4) Pisgah,
5) border, 6) cities, 7) villages, 8) delivered

Background image: “The Prophet Balaam and the Angel”
by John Linnell (1792–1882), oil on paper over panel

Image taken from https://artsandculture.google.com/asset/the-prophet-balaam-and-the-angel-john-linnell/_AHdigVVZRFakw?hl=en

HUDSON TAYLOR (1832-1905) PART VII

Retold by Jenny Lok
Illustrated by Andronicus Koshy

Retold from:

- "To China With Love" by Hudson Taylor, published by Dimension Books, Bethany Fellowship, Inc., Minneapolis, Minnesota, the United States
- "Hudson Taylor—God's Man in China" by Dr & Mrs Howard Taylor, published by Moody Press, Chicago, Illinois, the United States
- "Hudson Taylor and Maria, Pioneers in China" by J. C. Pollock, published by Kingsway Publications Ltd, the United Kingdom
- "God's Adventurer" by Phyllis Thompson, published by Overseas Missionary Fellowship (IHQ) Ltd, Singapore

Gradually, Hudson began to realise that life in Shanghai was not exactly what he had longed for. He had imagined reaching out to the pig-tailed Chinese people soon upon arrival, but instead found himself unable to venture very far from the mission compound due to constant fighting between the Taiping rebels and the Imperial army. Missionaries in China most certainly faced constant threats of being attacked. In fact, Hudson and Mr Wylie (his missionary friend) repeatedly experienced near escapes from death!

One morning, Hudson, together with one of the missionaries, was watching an ongoing battle from afar, in their mission house, when a used cannonball whizzed past between them. It hit the verandah wall and remained embedded within. How Hudson gave thanks to God for His great mercy in sparing their lives! On yet another occasion, Mr Wylie happened to leave a book on a table next to his chair. Five minutes later, upon returning to claim his book, he discovered—to his great shock—that a strong cannonball had landed on the chair and blown its arm away! Though rather shaken, both he and Hudson were mindful of God's daily protection over them.

Six months later, Hudson was glad to be able to rent a house within the Chinese community, outside the Settlement. His dream of living among the Chinese was finally fulfilled! Bursting with excitement, Hudson was eager to begin his Gospel work among the natives. They needed God's Word more than ever before, especially at a time when many were suffering pain and hunger because of war

within the country. Hudson longed for the day when the Chinese people would enjoy God's peace and comfort, and above all, His salvation. However, doing Gospel work often came with a price, and Hudson knew he must be prepared to risk his life for Christ.

One night, a frightening incident almost scared the wits out of Hudson. He woke up to the smell of burning wood in the air. There was a fire! To get a better view of the situation, Hudson climbed onto the rooftop. He saw that a fire was spreading rapidly along the row of wooden houses which lined the street. It did not help that the wind was howling with all its might. The fire was clearly just a very short distance away! Amid the spewing flames and smoke, Hudson could hear anxious chatter and desperate shouts across the street. His heart pounding, Hudson knelt down to pray, "Oh, Heavenly Father, may Thou be so gracious to deliver us from this fire. Please protect Thy servant, that he may continue to serve Thee." As he rose to his feet, it started to rain softly. All of a sudden, within a split second, a cannonball flew by and hit the roof of the building across the quadrangle. There was a loud "boom" and the roof tiles broke into pieces, sending a few of them in Hudson's direction. He ducked and managed to escape unhurt. By then, the powerful wind had dropped to a mere breeze. The rain began to fall rapidly, and soon the fire became just a flicker in the darkness. In his heart, Hudson was grateful to his Heavenly Father who constantly watched over him. After that harrowing night, Hudson decided that it was best to move back to



the Foreign Settlement, where he had first lodged. It was indeed a wise decision because the moment he had packed and left, the entire house was razed to the ground! It was yet another close shave for Hudson!

A couple of days later, Hudson had to take on a new responsibility. The Parkers, a missionary family, had just arrived in China, and Hudson's duty was to take care of their welfare. Before their arrival, he had hurriedly rented three upstairs rooms in the London Missionary Society compound. The rooms were sparsely furnished, with only "a Chinese bed, two tables and half a dozen chairs". As such, the Parkers' belongings ended up in a pile at one corner of the room—as there was not even a single shelf or wardrobe for their books and clothing. At the pathetic sight, Hudson felt so embarrassed that his face turned red. He was totally at a loss for words! Could the Parkers be able to live with such inconvenience and still serve the Lord? Reaching into his pocket, he fingered the three-dollar note, the only money left after having paid for the rental of the rooms. With a heavy heart, Hudson prayed silently, "Almighty God, Thou has promised to the saints of

old that Thou will not fail them nor forsake them. Likewise, Lord, have mercy on Thy servants and provide for us. We trust in Thee, for Thy way is always perfect. In Jesus' name, Amen!"

Just as Hudson ended his prayer, Dr Parker smiled and said, "Well, Hudson, we'll make do with all that God has provided for us here. Thank you so much for helping us to get the rooms at such short notice. We are most thankful to the Lord for you!" Dr Parker's words were comforting enough to lift Hudson's downcast spirits. He knew that servants of God must battle against anything and everything that keep them from serving God effectively. They must persevere in the Gospel work like a good soldier of Christ, as stated in 2 Timothy 2:3—"Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ."

The year of 1854 went swiftly by and soon it was autumn. Hudson had not stopped yearning to preach to the Chinese face to face all this while. One day, to his great delight, Edkins, his missionary friend, suggested, "Why don't we take a trip to Ka-shing? We can hire a native houseboat for about a week and travel slowly. While making stops at the towns and cities, we can give out tracts and do some preaching. Are you coming with me?"

"A chance to travel inland to make contact with the Chinese and sow the Gospel seeds! Of course, I am with you!" Hudson was quick to jump at the suggestion.

Hudson lost no time in getting ready for the rare trip to see more of China and its people in the many villages beyond the city. To Hudson's great delight, theirs was not the only houseboat along the wide waterway. There were other houseboats full of the natives, who were busy chatting away in their local dialects. Hudson was just so happy to be among them! How he wished every one of them would hear the Good News! Many hours later, the houseboat was about 40 miles south of Shanghai, approaching the Fu city of Sungkiang, when something unusual caught Hudson's attention.

"Edkins, look! What a huge crowd! They are standing there at the courtyard of the monastery beyond the bank. See how they are staring at us!"

"It must be our western looks and attire. They appear interested to know what we are up to. Come, let's strike while the iron is hot!" Edkins responded with a twinkle in his eyes.

Once the two young men got off the houseboat, Hudson began distributing the booklets they brought along while Edkins prepared to preach the Gospel. Among the people gathered in front of them were monks with shiny, clean-shaven heads, and clad in drabby yellow robes. They eagerly made their way to Edkins and Hudson after the preaching was over.



"Honourable gentlemen, please come inside. We would like you to meet the 'holy man'," they requested courteously. Edkins and Hudson had the same thought: "This is an unexpected opportunity to reach out to an unbelieving soul. Let's be ready to preach the Gospel to anyone who would listen." Praying in their hearts to the Lord, they followed the monks who led them to a corner of the monastery where they saw a cell (or small room) within a wall. There was only a tiny light shining in from outside and so, in the dimness, they could only see the figure of a man seated against the wall.

"May I ask who is this man that is walled up here?" inquired Edkins.

"He is a devotee who has decided to spend his life by himself, away from his fellow men. In that way, he hopes to crush his sins and achieve holiness. Every day, we will pass him his food and drink through the tiny opening. That's how he has been living for years," replied one of the monks.

"Oh, poor soul, don't you know that only Christ can forgive your sins and set you free!" exclaimed Hudson, whose heart was greatly moved.

The two young missionaries wanted to reach out to that wretched man with the Gospel immediately. Edkins, being more conversant with the Chinese language, went over and stood near the hole. Peering into the tiny opening, he spoke kindly and earnestly to the desperate soul who needed the only True God to free him from the bondage of sins.

"Dear sir, Jesus had died on the cross for the sins of mankind, and He rose from the dead on the third day, to be the Saviour of those who would trust in Him. You cannot save yourself by living such a life, shut out from the rest of the world. Nothing that you do can save you, except the Lord Jesus Christ, who is

"the way, the truth, and the life". No one can come to God except by Christ, according to John 14:6 in the Bible. I plead with you. Leave your cell and come to Christ. He can help you!"

Meanwhile, Hudson was praying to the Lord, "Oh God, open the eyes of this miserable soul, that he may know Thee and taste of Thy goodness in his life!"

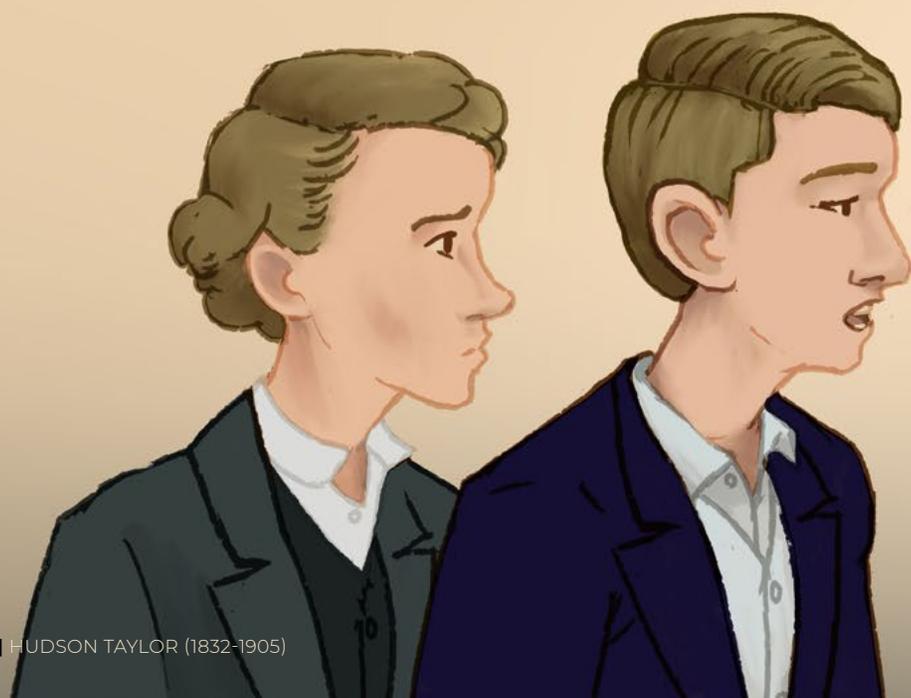
Both Edkins and Hudson waited for a moment, but received no response from 'the holy man'—neither from the monks who stood there, looking rather unconvinced by the "strange" preaching. Never in their lives had anyone spoken to them in such a manner, and what they had just heard was totally new to them. In the end, they politely led both Edkins and Hudson away from the man in the walled-up hole, bowed to them and then retreated to their secluded life in the darkness of the monastery.

Edkins glanced at Hudson with a smile and said, "Brother, we have already preached the Word of God. May the Holy Spirit move their stony hearts to believe in the Lord soon."

"Yes, it would be really wonderful news if they could one day enjoy new freedom in Christ, liberated at last from the bondage of sins!" Hudson added.

"Amen to that!" Edkins said, nodding his head thoughtfully.

(To be continued)





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