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THE UNPARDONABLE SIN.*

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In the immediately preceding context, the apostle is discussing the subject of prayer. "And this is the confidence we have in him, that if we ask anything according to his will, he heareth us; and if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him. If any man see his brother sin a sin which is not unto death, he shall ask and he shall give him life for them that sin not unto death." He then adds the text: "There is a sin unto death. I do not say that he shall pray for it." What that sin is, he does not tell us. How those to whom he was writing might know when one had committed it, and so not pray for him, he does not inform us. Perhaps they had information on the subject of which he gives us no account. But, however that may be, what it concerns us to observe is, that the text plainly teaches that there is a sin that is unpardonable; a sin in regard to which no prayer is to be offered; a sin that crosses the "mysterious boundary that separates between God's patience and his wrath," and irretrievably dooms the soul to eternal death.

This solemn truth is taught in many other passages in these pages. It is taught in the Old Testament, as, for instance, by the Prophet Isaiah. When that prophet was commissioned to preach to his countrymen, he was informed beforehand that they would hear, indeed, but that they would not understand; that they would see, but that they would not perceive; that the only effect of his preaching on them would be that their eyes would grow dull, and their ears grow heavy, and their hearts wax fat;

*A sermon preached in the Seminary Chapel December, 1906.

PRAYING THE LORD OF THE HARVEST.—Matt. ix. 38.*

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“Pray ye therefore,” *i. e.* because “the harvest is great and the laborers are few.” Shall we do violence to this language if we stretch it around the world? I think not. While Jesus may have pointed the attention of his disciples merely to the multitudes immediately before them; or at most, have suggested to their minds only the multitudes of Galilee and Judea, their own fellow countrymen; yet we know that the mind and heart of Jesus, his desires and designs—his grace and compassion—were not bounded by any such narrow limits. With him the “field” was always, and is always the world. There is not a spot on the face of the earth where men dwell that is not swept by the vision of Christ and included as a part of the great harvest field.

Giving this broad meaning to his words, how signally true, how sadly, tragically true it is that the “harvest is plenteous and the laborers are few!” The largest part of this field is entirely destitute of laborers. Hundreds of millions of our fellow-sinners never saw and never heard a preacher of the gospel. In other vast heathen populations there are here and there little groups of missionaries, merely enough to emphasize the need. As our Saviour sees the multitudes in all these lands, the crowded millions of China and India, the degraded myriads of Africa and the Islands of the Sea, the no less needy and vicious populations of our own great cities, he is moved with compassion on them. Blessed be his name, he has not turned his face away from the world that could not endure his presence, that could not suffer him to grow old, as “he went about doing good,” but hurried him to a felon’s doom in the prime of his early manhood. He

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cherishes no resentment. He is moved with compassion as he looks upon them—not at their poverty, their physical discomfort, not at their many ills to which flesh is heir, but because they are as sheep, distressed and scattered, needing care and guidance, without a shepherd. Jesus pities the innumerable multitudes of all lands that are stumbling on in spiritual darkness down to hopeless graves, who have no one to show them the way of life, and to help them to find a safe refuge before the night comes on. He pities them because they have no preachers. He would have the world filled with preachers. This was one of the last things that filled his mind before he went back to the Father. He desired that there should be some one to preach the gospel to every creature.

In view of this sad state of things, what does Jesus command his disciples to do?

I. "*Pray ye, &c.*" Is this all? Does he lay no other duty on us except to pray? This is all. He says to us, "Turn to God, the Lord of the harvest, and ask him to send forth laborers, and he will do it." How many? As many as are needed. It has been estimated that it would require an additional army of 40,000 missionaries to break to the destitute heathen the bread of life, so that every one might have a little. If we ask God, will he give us that many? Yes, why not? He can do it. "All souls are mine," he says, and he can dispose of them as he will. He can "make them willing in the day of his power." Forty thousand can easily be spared from the ranks of evangelical Christendom, and these, the strongest and the best. O, but it would take \$40,000,000 to send them out and support them. Well, what of that? Little Christian England sent out 230,000 men to South Africa, and supported them at a cost of \$240,000,000. There are in the Protestant churches of Great Britain and America about 25,000,000. If these would average only one cent per day, there would be money enough to support all our present missionary work, and far more than 40,000 additional missionaries. It would be no great miracle, would it, for God to enable Christians to give on an average of one cent a day to make Christ known to the world?

There is nothing impracticable, then, in this plan proposed by our Saviour to meet the spiritual needs of the multitudes. Without anything approaching to a miracle, God could summon from

the hosts of Protestant Christendom enough laborers to supply the field, and secure money enough to support them. The dying words of Simeon Calhoun were well-matured words: "It is of deep conviction, and I say it again and again, that if the Church of Christ were what she ought to be, twenty years would not pass away till the story of the cross would be uttered in the ears of every living man." "*Pray ye.*" That is all. Christ expected us to fill the world with missionary laborers by simply praying to the Lord of the harvest. But Christendom has been tugging away at this gigantic task for years and years, for centuries and centuries, and do we understand that it can be done in this easy way? Perhaps it is not so easy, but this is Christ's command. He bids us ask the Father, and the promise is wrapped up in the command. "Ask and ye shall receive."

II. Have we not been praying? Some five years ago, our General Assembly, alarmed at the declining number of candidates for the ministry, called the Church to prayer. The call has been renewed from time to time. I have been watching for the answer. I have not seen it yet. Elijah did not have to wait five years before seeing the evidence that his prayer had reached the ear of God. Does it not seem that by this time the Church should be seeing the cloud? But it has not made its appearance. I think I am correct in saying that, in proportion to number of communicants, we have never had fewer laborers than we have to-day! Have we proved that the Saviour's plan is ineffective? May it not be that there has been no answer because there has been no prayer? It is one thing to say prayers; it is quite another thing to pray. The twelve disciples learned this. They had been saying prayers since early childhood. But they had not been long with Jesus until it was painfully borne in on them not only that they had not been praying, but that they did not know how to pray. They saw plainly that prayer did not mean for them what it meant for him. They were not getting from it the uplift, the joy and the power that he found in it. Unquestionably he regarded prayer as a Christian's supreme resource. It was the source of strength and of guiding influence to his own marvelous activities. More than twelve legions of angels always waited on his prayers. He commends it as of equal value to his disciples. "Whatsoever ye ask in my name, I will do it." "Put faith as a grain of mustard seed into your prayer, and it will hurl

the mountain from its base." Have we been praying the Lord of the harvest? I very much doubt it. What we have been doing, perhaps, demonstrates that we do not know how to pray. God was never closer to the world than he is to-day; his heart never more tender; his power to answer prayer never greater.

III. What, then, is prayer? It "is the offering up of our desires unto God, for things agreeable to his will." We have had a part of it—we have been asking for things agreeable to his will. But what about the desire? Where there is no desire, there is no prayer. Where there is no strong desire, there is no guarantee of an answer. It is the "effectual, fervent prayer" that availeth much. "Ye shall seek me and find me, &c." Prevailing prayer is the earnest cry of the heart for what it really wants. The lips can not pray. They can recite words. They can repeat beautiful formulas of devotion. But they cannot pray. The heart, the heart, the heart, alone, can pray! David felt this when he said: "Thou desirest not sacrifice, else would I give it." O if worship were merely some outward thing, how easy to offer it. But "the sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise." Alas, how often our lips are repeating a lesson which they have learned, while our hearts, our wayward, wicked hearts, are wandering like the fool's eyes, to the uttermost parts of the earth.

In his little book, *Daniel Quorm and His Religious Reflections*, Mark Guy Pierce gives us a suggestive hint on this subject. In passing through the country, Daniel stops over night with an old friend whom he had not seen for years. Next morning his friend holds family worship. He prays among other things that the heavenly Father would give them the Holy Spirit to enable them to be patient and gentle, and loving, and Christlike in their lives. Daniel thought: "What a good man, what an earnest Christian my friend has come to be." About 12 o'clock he went out to where his friend was at work on his farm. He found him fussing and fuming and all out of sorts. When he came in to dinner, he was quarrelling because dinner was late. By and by he said: "Daniel, the servants are so trifling these days that it is enough to wear a man's life out to deal with them." Whereupon Daniel said to him: "My friend, you are disappointed, are you not?" "No, I don't know as I am; what do you mean?" "You failed to get that gift you were expecting." "What gift,

Daniel, I was not expecting any gift; whatever do you mean?" "O, you were not expecting any gift. I heard you ask your heavenly Father for one, and I thought perhaps you were expecting it, and had been disappointed." "O, that is what you are talking about, is it?" "Yes, that is what I am talking about. It is evident you did not expect an answer to your prayer; and if God had answered it, and given you the patience and gentleness of Christ, your family would have thought you were ailing, and would have sent for the doctor." Do we ever pray like Daniel's friend?

"Out of the heart are the issues of life." Out of the heart issue all prayers that are worthy the name of prayers. Thus our life and our prayers have the same source. Is our heart crying out for something? Then our life is reaching out for the same thing. The heart never goes one way and the life another. As is the heart, so is the life, and as is the life, so is the prayer.

IV. What is the proof of prayer? An effort to obtain that for which we have prayed. Suppose a boy looks over into a farmer's orchard and sees some beautiful red apples that make an almost irresistible appeal to his appetite. He says: "I must have some of those apples." He goes to the house of the farmer and politely asks for them. The farmer says: "My boy, just go and help yourself." Does the boy regard his prayer as answered? Or does he turn away and say: "The stingy, old fellow would not give me a single apple?" Look at his flying feet as he hastens to the coveted fruit. The Church looks across the seas at the lands lying in darkness, and then goes down on her knees and prays the Lord to send forth laborers. The Lord says: "The way is open, help yourself." What does the Church do? Gets up and says: "The Lord is deaf to our prayer." The trouble is, that none of us are willing to go, and we are praying the Lord of the harvest to send somebody else.

I doubt whether any disciple of Christ can offer this prayer unless he have that measure of the missionary spirit that would make him willing, if eligible, to answer his own prayer. When Isaiah saw the vision and heard the voice saying: "Whom shall I send and who will go for us?" what did he do? One thing he didn't do; he did not say, "well, I don't know who will go. Somebody ought, and I will pray about it, and see if anybody will offer." "Behold me," he said, "send me." How did he know he

would fill the bill? He did not know it. He had not been asked to go. He only heard the voice asking for some one to go somewhere and to do something. He knew not who, nor where, nor what. He only knew that wherever or whatever, he was ready for it, if the Lord thought he was the man. That is the spirit of consecration demanded of one who is to pray this prayer. It appears that the very next morning after Jesus laid this command on his disciples, twelve of them were commissioned and went forth to answer their own prayer. A little later on he appointed seventy others, and immediately on their appointment, he puts this prayer into their lips. They could offer it sincerely and earnestly for they had surrendered their own hearts to the Lord's service. Every true missionary can offer this prayer.

Listen to this testimony of Hudson Taylor. He and about a dozen other men gathered together to spend eight days in waiting on God—four alternate days being days of fasting as well as prayer. "When we gathered together, we were led to pray for one hundred missionaries to be sent out by our English Board in the year 1887, from January to December. And further than this, our income had not been elastic for some years—it had been about £22,000, and we were led in connection with that Forward Movement to ask God for £10,000 in addition to the income of the previous year. What was the result? God sent out offers of service from over 600 men and women during the following year, and those who were deemed to be ready and suitable were accepted, and were sent out to China; and it proved to be exactly one hundred. What about the income? God did not give us exactly the £10,000 we asked for, but he gave us £11,000." Is there anything wonderful about this? Nothing. They were offering up the desires of their hearts for things agreeable to the will of God, and it would have been wonderful if he had not heard them.

If only we could get this prayer into the heart and life of the Church, there would be no difficulty about men and money. Every eligible man would be an available man. This is true in the Moravian Church, and the result is that they have one missionary for every fifty-eight members, and two communicants on the foreign field for every one at home.

V. The prayer that gets the men will get the money. The Church will never really pray for more men than she is willing to

support. We know, when we pray for them that their support is to come out of our pockets. Consequently a prayer for enlarged expenses contains a promise to give more money. A few days ago, the Mayor of San Francisco telegraphed the Mayor of Chicago: "Send us carpenters." Not a word about the expense of sending them, nor their pay when they reached their destination. The request carried all this with it. When we send a prayer to God for more laborers, the prayer creates an obligation to send out and support as many as the Lord sees fit to furnish.

Here, again, let us apply the test and see whether we have been really praying the Lord of the harvest. During the greater part of the time since the Assembly first issued its call to prayer, we have been giving on an average of 82 cents per annum per member, to send men to the foreign field. This gave a very meagre support to the force already dependent on us. How many additional men did we expect the Lord to give us for the harvest field? As indicated by the total lack of provision for the support of additional laborers we did not expect the Lord to send one.

Brethren, I would not criticise harshly, or rashly the Church of Christ, but, weighing well my words, I say that the Church has not been praying the Lord of the harvest to send forth laborers into his harvest. Our own Southern Presbyterian Church has not responded to the call of the General Assembly. Why? Simply because its heart is not in the work of world-wide evangelization. Each particular congregation thinks if it has the money it can hire some one to minister to its own needs, and that is about as far as its interest extends. Individuals here and there are interested in giving the gospel to the world. I am thankful to believe the number is rapidly increasing, and their interest is deepening. But the Church at large, the rank and file, care nothing for missions. In thousands of congregations no collection is taken. In other thousands, the collection is a sad revelation of utter apathy. It is made up for the most part of nickles and dimes, the same kind of coin that we throw to beggars, to the organ grinder and his monkey, to get rid of them. It shows that missions and beggars are held in the same esteem. Think of 82 cents per member. "The effectual, fervent prayer of the righteous availeth much," but 82 cents are not much. If

we wasted no more than 82 cents in twelve months, would we not be regarded as models of economy? O, if it could be shown we had not spent on peanuts and pop-corn and soda-water more than 82 cents in the course of a whole twelve months, we would be regarded as prodigies of parsimony! O, if the cause of world-wide evangelization could only come in for the waste of the Church, it would make a grand stride forward. And can it be said that the Church is interested in missions when it withholds from that cause even the leakage, the waste, the superfluity of self-indulgence? Alexander Duff said that the Church in his day was "merely playing at missions." This may seem little praise, but it is more than the Church deserves. If the Church were even playing at missions it would take an interest in its play.

Why am I stressing this? What good can it do to dwell on the dereliction of the Church? What comfort can we extract from it? My object is to make this the basis of an appeal to my brethren in the ministry. Are you called to the ministry? Then you are called to the work of the foreign field—every last one of you. There isn't any doubt of that. You may settle down in some little county or village pastorate, but don't suppose that is your field—that is a very small part of it. The whole world is your field, and if you close your eyes to any part of it, you will not be faithful to your Master. The same is true of the Church which you may serve. On it rests the obligation to do what it can to give the gospel to the world. It is your duty to teach the members this obligation. If you can't do this, if you can't get them to recognize their responsibility in this matter, you have missed your calling.

"To the pastor," says Dr. George F. Pentecost, "belongs the privilege and responsibility of solving the missionary problem. Until the pastors of our churches wake to the truth of this proposition, and the foreign work of the Church becomes a passion in their own hearts and consciences, our board may continue to do what they may or can, by way of organizing forward movements, and devising new methods for exploiting the churches for money, the chariot wheels of foreign missions will drive heavily." I believe every word of this, and while I honor the young men who have begun and developed so hopefully the Forward Movement in our own Church, it has seemed to me a serious reflection on our pastors that the services of these young men were, and

are, needed. Any man, called of God, and laboring where God has placed him, ought, with God's help, to be equal to the demands of that place.

Brethren, go forth resolved to rouse the Church to prayer, to real, downright, earnest prayer. This is the primary and urgent need. All else will follow. We are accustomed to represent that the last word of Christ was the word of command, bidding his disciples go. But not so. His last command was a command not to go—it was a command to tarry, and we see how that was interpreted as a command to pray. Prayer brought Pentecost, and Pentecost brought both men and money. Jesus knew it would; and Jesus knows it will. The divine order is prayer, and Pentecost and missions. If we will only pray, if we can only arouse the Church to pray, God will give the Pentecost, and then missions will take charge of themselves.

Prayer was the key that unlocked the heavens of old. Elijah once carried that key. Did you ever notice how he used it? See him on Carmel. He has just gained a great, and what he deems a decisive, victory over idolatry, and he thinks the time has come for the long penal drought to end. The people have shouted with great enthusiasm: "The Lord, he is God," and so he thinks they ought to have rain. He prostrates himself, Oriental fashion, and prays. He rises and looks for a cloud. Strange that he should expect one so soon, but he did, and was disappointed. Sent his servant to the top of the hill to look out over the sea. "Surely there must be a cloud somewhere." But the servant returns and tells him he can see one nowhere. Then, down on his knees again, and again he looks for the cloud. Again he sends his servant. Again disappointed. Down he goes again, and again he expects a cloud. Six prayers, six sending of the servant, six disappointments. But he had the key, he knew he had it, and down he went again, and you remember the sequel. When we learn to pray like Elijah, we shall see the cloud, and the showers of blessing.