

GOD'S CHALLENGE TO HIS PEOPLE

"Call unto me and I will answer thee and show thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not" (Jeremiah 33:3).

These words constitute the mightiest challenge that the Lord ever made to men. We hear much in these days about the challenge to the churches. True there is a challenge to the people of God, but it is not, as many suppose, from the world, but from God Himself, and is contained in the words of the text.

We need not pay any attention to the world's challenge until we have first attended to God's challenge. Then, when we have given heed to God's challenge He will attend to the world's challenge. The challenge has held through these thousands of years since it was uttered, and it still holds. No one has ever yet scaled its topmost peak. No one has ever yet measured its full length. No one has ever yet spanned its breadth.

There the challenge stands. It has come ringing to us today, clear and strong, across the centuries, but our weak and powerless and backslidden churches are afraid or too indifferent to accept the challenge and release the power of God upon a doomed world. Shall we dare to accept the challenge today? Shall we come up to the held of the Lord against the mighty? Yea, shall we go to our closets, and there call upon God, confident that He will answer us and show us the great and mighty things He has promised?

The text suggests four things:

I. The Method Of Prayer.

"Call unto me" is a command to pray. These words were addressed by God to all that was left of the once prosperous and blessed nations of Israel, at a time of great national need. The great and mighty Babylon was crowding her hard and was about to take her captive. It would be a captivity from which she would never recover until the Lord Jesus should return to this earth.

But Israel was flirting with Egypt and trying to get the king of Egypt to send men and munitions with which to resist Babylon. It was at this juncture that God said unto His people, "Call unto me." Do not turn back to Egypt from which I have redeemed you, but "call unto me." Do not turn to the beggarly elements of the world, but turn to Me, saith the Lord.

Just as the nation of Babylon was besetting the people of God in that day, so today the system of Babylon is besetting the churches of our Lord. And the fact is also true, that as it was with the nation of Israel, so it is with the churches. They are flirting with Egypt and turning to worldly methods. But, thank God, His method is still the same today as it was then and it is "call unto me." We do not forget to eat, or to go to our beds to rest, but we often forget or neglect to pray. We have hours for the world, but only moments for Christ.

This is a challenge to our faith. We cannot discern God by any of our five senses. We cannot see Him, we cannot hear Him, we cannot feel Him, we cannot taste Him, and we cannot smell Him. In the natural we cannot comprehend God, so we naturally want to turn to things that we can understand, for help. When we are sick we want to call for the doctors instead of the elders. When we need money we want to call upon the rich. When we are in distress we want to call upon our

friends. But faith makes God so real to us that He becomes a living reality. Through faith we get a vision of God and we lose sight of Egypt.

This is a challenge to our love. When in need the child instinctively calls upon its mother for help because it loves and trusts her. The wife naturally calls upon her husband because she loves him and the same is true of the husband. Likewise, the real child of God instinctively calls upon his Heavenly Father because he loves Him. One can judge another's love for God by the way he calls upon Him. When love for God begins to wane, just in that proportion does one begin to call upon Egypt for help.

This is a challenge to our simplicity. How simple a call is! Anyone can call. The little child as well as the most mature man can call. Ignorant and educated alike can call. Not even do we have to utter a word to call. The heart can call. Sometimes the call is so deep that it cannot be expressed in words, but it is a call nevertheless. God has made the method of prayer so simple that it has come within the reach of everyone. Some say, I do not know how to pray. A call is the instinctive utterance of the human heart, and God wants prayer to be the instinctive utterance of the redeemed heart. The flesh naturally wants to form some high sounding, oratorical plea or else use its pull and influence in order to bring things to pass; but God says, "Be simple, be natural, and call unto me."

This is a challenge to our patience. Naturally, the impatient flesh, when it does not see things come to pass as rapidly as it would like, wants to plunge in and do things. But God's ways are not our ways, and often He delays His answers for the very purpose of teaching us patience. To simply lay aside every other help, and call unto God, and then wait for Him to answer, when it seems as if any moment the whole house would crash in on our heads, is surely a test of and a challenge to our patience.

While the world's Babylon is pressing hard on every hand, shall we call upon Egypt for help, or shall we in patient faith and love and simplicity call upon God?

II. The Majesty Of Prayer.

"I will answer thee." Can you comprehend the majesty of these words? There is not any display here, or any trying to show off what God can do. Simply the marvelous, mighty, majestic God says, "I will." This ought to be enough to calm the most turbulent heart and bring rest and assurance to the most troubled soul.

There is no limitation to the answer, nor a suggestion that more might be asked than God is able to give. With an earthly monarch his "I will" is limited by his power to perform. But not so with our God. There is a majesty and dignity here of which the rulers of this world know nothing. It speaks of the bounty and unlimited power of our God, in being able and willing to answer the smallest as well as the largest request of His child.

Nothing is too hard for our God. If you will call, God will answer. To the one who dares to accept the challenge of God there will come into his life a majesty and dignity and poise that will be the marvel of the world. Even the most unlettered saint can possess this majesty because he is resting in the assurance of God's "I will answer thee" to undergird and strengthen him.

When Israel called upon the King of Egypt for help, the king hesitated, because he wanted first to know what Israel would pay him for his help; if Israel were

able to pay what she had promised to pay, and if Egypt were able to defeat Babylon after she had promised to help Israel. But not so with our God. The mere fact that one of His children is calling upon Him is enough, and with alacrity He flees to answer the call. He does not stop to consider what we can pay, because He knows that we are bankrupt, and besides in the person of His Son the price is already paid, and we are the beneficiaries of free grace. Neither does He stop to consider if He is able to defeat Babylon, for all power in heaven and on earth is His.

The God Who cannot lie has said, "I will answer thee." Shall we believe Him, and prove Him, by calling upon Him, or shall we turn to Egypt for help?

III. The Mightiness Of Prayer.

"And show thee great and mighty things." Israel had been looking at, and was terrified by the greatness and mightiness of Babylon. She could not see God's greatness and mightiness at all, hence the promise from God. Looking at Babylon had taken all of the strength out of her, and rendered her weak and helpless in the hands of her enemy. It made her flee to Egypt for help. So it will do for you, beloved. If your eyes dwell upon the greatness and mightiness of the Babylonian systems of this world, it will rob you of your power and effectiveness for God, and you too will be forced to flee to Egypt for help.

God allowed this adversity to come into the lives of His chosen people to take their eyes off the great and mighty Babylon and to fix them upon His greatness and all-mightiness. And so today, God bids us not to be discouraged by the increasing might of the Babylonish systems of this world. Remember that He is almighty, and that if one will call, He will answer and show that one "great and mighty things."

The day is coming when the terrified cry is going to ring through the world, "Babylon the mighty has fallen." Then the kingdom of this world will become the kingdom of our Christ. This will be a sight worth seeing, and God is going to show this great and mighty thing to those who have called upon Him and not to those who have called upon Egypt.

There is all-mightiness in prayer. To the one who calls upon Him, God pulls away the curtain and shows him the mighty armies of heaven working to answer him, as He did with Elisha and his servant at Dothan. Prayer is like the electric switch, which when thrown in place, instantly connects with the mighty generators at the power house, and puts in motion a city's machinery, runs its street cars, lights its streets, and is a blessing to every home. So when we pray the switch is thrown into place which connects the finite with the infinite, and we are shown "great and mighty things" which are generated only in the heart of God.

IV. The Mystery Of Prayer.

"Which thou knowest not." In all true prayer there is always an element of mystery. A mystery is something that is concealed in the heart of God which has not yet been revealed unto men. Prayer has its mysteries because we are calling upon a God Who deals in mysteries. "God works in mysterious ways His wonders to perform." Prayer has its mysteries because we know not how and when the answer will come. We know only two things: that God hath said, "I will answer thee," and that the answer will reveal "great and mighty things." God deems this enough for us to know at present, and the balance remains a mystery until God chooses to reveal it.

Tucked away in the heart of God, for safe keeping, so that neither demons nor men can discover it, and mar its blessedness, is the mysterious answer to our prayers. God will not let us know beforehand what the answer is, because then we would try to help God bring the answer to pass. Thus we would spoil the answer, hinder God, and rob Him of His glory. No, beloved, "thou knowest not" the answer until God is ready to reveal it and "show you great and mighty things." It remains a mystery until God chooses to reveal it and no man can discover it.

Did you ever have your mother tell you to shut your eyes and open your mouth and then she would give you something good? Concealed in her hand behind her back was a hidden something that she was anxious to give you, and you were anxious to have. The conditions were that you should shut your eyes and open your mouth. Concealed in the heart of God is a mysterious blessing that He is anxious to give you, and that you are anxious to receive. The conditions are that you shut your eyes in blind faith and open your mouth wide to receive it.

What you do with your mother's request depends upon how much you love and trust her. If you love and trust her much, you will be quick to shut your eyes and open your mouth, waiting for her to deposit that good thing in your mouth. If you doubt her a little, your eyes would be half shut and your mouth half open to catch the thing in your teeth, and taste it before you let it go into your mouth. If you did not have any confidence in her, you would work to get around behind her back and see what she had in her hand.

What shall be your attitude toward God? Shall we by our works try to get behind the back of God, and bring the answer to pass in our own way, and thereby prove how little we really love and trust Him? Shall we with our eyes half shut, in a trembling faith, and our mouth half open in a faltering call, wait in anxious fear, to see what the answer will be? Or shall we shut our eyes in implicit love and trust and open our mouth wide to call, knowing that He will answer and show us "great and mighty things"?

Babylon is crowding the churches hard on every hand these days and it is getting worse and worse. Dare we be numbered among the few now, as in Jeremiah's time, and accept God's challenge to His churches and call upon Him that He may answer us and show us great and mighty things that we know not?