

A PRAYER OF THE CHURCH

Preached at Providence Chapel, Oakham, Lord's Day Morning, September 14th, 1845

"Save, LORD; let the king hear us when we call" Psalm 20:9

When a man is brought to know and feel that he has a soul to be lost or saved, nothing will then be so important in his eyes as to know whether he is a partaker of salvation. Until the Lord is pleased to quicken our souls into spiritual life, and to lay eternal realities with weight and power on our consciences, we have no care, we have no anxiety, as to our state before God; but no sooner does the Lord communicate light and life to our hearts than we begin to feel that we have a soul that must live for ever and ever in a state of torment or in a state of happiness. And when we are brought to feel these things, it will make us desire above all things to know whether indeed salvation ever will reach us. This appears to have been the feeling of the church when she breathed forth this petition "Save, LORD; let the king hear us when we call." The text consists of two clauses:

I. One, "*Save, LORD.*"

II. The other, "*Let the king hear us when we call.*"

These two clauses I shall endeavour, if God enable, to unfold according to the mind of the Spirit this morning. May the Lord add his blessing.

I. You will observe that the church who offered these prayers knew well in what that salvation consisted. She was not one of those that trusted in chariots and horses, but she looked to the finished work of the Son of God; and uttering this

petition, "Save, LORD," what she wanted was the manifestation, the application of that salvation to her soul. This is the grand difference betwixt one who has received the love of the truth, and one who is wrapped up in Pharisaism and error that he who has received the love of the truth knows that salvation is already accomplished by the Son of God on the cross, and wants the application, the manifestation, of that salvation to his heart with power; whereas, the other, who is wrapped up in self-righteousness, and given over to believe a lie, is looking for salvation as coming out of something to be done by himself [as to believe], something that he is to obtain by an act of his own, or that springs out of the flesh. But whence comes the difference? Why should it be that one is looking for salvation from Christ's finished work, and wanting the powerful application of it to his soul, and the other for salvation from something to be done by himself? From this, that he who has received the love of the truth has been previously emptied and stripped of self-confidence. As Paul says, "For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit" having had a spiritual revelation of God to the soul "and rejoice in Christ Jesus" from receiving him into the heart as a perfect Saviour; "and," as a consequence, "have no confidence in the flesh," seeing that the flesh is utterly sinful, and therefore everything that comes out of it is abominable in the sight of God. That is the reason why the people of God are looking for salvation as a reality to be applied to their consciences, whilst others are looking for it as something to be done by themselves to gain the favour of God. The people of God are more or less convinced by the Spirit that there is no good in themselves, and therefore everything they have good must be a free gift from the super-abounding grace of God.

It may take some time, it may be a process of many years, it may be the result of many painful trials, it may be the fruit of

many perplexing anxieties, to bring a man to renounce all confidence in the flesh; but till he is brought to renounce all such freshly dependence, he never can be brought to rely upon the finished work of Christ alone. He is very much where Hart says he himself was. There was a time when he thought he would repent, he would believe, and he would save his own soul; but he found to his bitter sorrow it was no longer with him whether he would repent, but whether God would give him repentance; no longer whether he would believe, but whether God would be so kind as to give him the precious grant of faith. I believe every child of God is brought there to be so emptied of self, so utterly and thoroughly brought down in his feelings before the footstool of God, as to feel unless the Lord stretch forth his hand to save him he must sink in the deep waters.

The church, then, prays, "Save, LORD." "Do favour me with an application of thy salvation unto my heart. Assure my soul of its interest in the finished work of thy dear Son" This is the language of every soul brought down so as to feel that without an experimental knowledge of the blood and love of Christ, it must sink for ever. But when the church says, "Lord, save." What does it imply? It implies that we are to be saved from something; or else it is no salvation. Salvation is not a mere negative thing; it is an actual rescue, a real deliverance, a true bringing of the soul out of distressing trouble. So that when the church says, "Save," it implies that she wanted to be delivered out of that which would else prove her ruin.

For instance:

1. There is the *guilt* of sin. Now, however painful and distressing it may be, I believe that every soul taught of God must painfully and experimentally know the guilt of sin.

There is no feeling so miserable as that of guilt, when it is charged home by God the Spirit upon the conscience. It cuts to pieces all the sinews of merit and creature righteousness; it sinks the soul down below all creature strength and all creature wisdom. It so penetrates into the very chambers of the heart that it does not leave a single corner untouched. Guilt really felt is of an over whelming nature; it must bow down the head, it must break the back, of every one who feels it. But whenever guilt is felt in the conscience, it will make every such guilty sinner cry to the Lord to save him. Save him from the guilt of sin. I believe every one who has felt the guilt of sin by the application of the law to his conscience, knows in time that nothing but the blood of Christ revealed to his soul by the power of God the Spirit, can ever remove it. It may sometimes seem to wear off, it may be dulled; the intensity of the painful feelings may not be so vivid; but it will come on again. And a little thing may bring it on. A passing thought, a sudden recollection of eternity, hearing the bell toll, or seeing the coffin borne to the grave, the least thing to raise up a thought of death in the mind, will bring back guilt in the conscience. So that, though it does not always lie with power on the conscience, it will come again and again, and bring burdens and trouble, until it is removed by the blood of sprinkling, until the remedy goes into the same depth as the malady, until the virtue and efficacy of the blood of the Son of God are really felt through the power of the Holy Ghost. When, then, the church says, "Save, LORD," she is begging the Lord to give her eyes to see, and a heart to embrace, the propitiation that Jesus has made upon Calvary, so that she might enter into the blessedness of pardon through the blood of the Lamb.

2. But there is not only the guilt, but also the *power* of sin, that every living soul feels. What a powerful thing sin is! It is something like a deep and rapid river, the deeper the stream

the more rapid the current. We only know the depth of the stream by being well-nigh drowned in it; and we only know the strength of the current by feeling it carrying us away, in spite of all our strength to swim against it. Sin in the heart is this deep and rapid stream; it is not a babbling brook, but a deep, rapid current. But we do not at first know what a powerful thing it is. We have no more power to stand against it, unless God in mercy strengthen us, than the thistledown can against the wind. As a giant might carry away a child in his arms, or as a lion might seize a lamb out of the fold, or as a tiger might run off with a calf, so we are carried away instantaneously by sin, unless God strengthen us in our souls against it. Who does not feel, that knows anything of the workings of sin in the carnal mind, how the base heart carries us away into sin in a moment, unless God in mercy prevent? Now this is one of the most painful things that a child of God can experience. The guilt and the power of sin work together. Sin first carries us away by its power, and then is felt in its guilt.

Now a child of God who has been carried away by sin, I do not mean open, flagitious, flagrant acts, but the daily workings of his heart, will go to the Lord sometimes with many sighs and tears, earnestly entreating him that he would save him from the power of sin by putting his fear into his heart, by making his conscience tender. And this the Lord answers sometimes by breathing a secret power into the soul, whereby he keeps the feet back from evil; sometimes by breaking down a temptation, so as to make it no longer a temptation; sometimes restraining him by his providence; and sometimes holding him back by his grace.

But when the church said, "Save, LORD," there were many things she wanted to be saved from. For instance, *the power of unbelief*. Does not unbelief often carry us away? Is it not

perpetually working in the heart? It is so in mine, to my sorrow. Is it not perpetually teasing, harassing, and bubbling up like a stream? Is it not perpetually drawing us aside, and entangling us in some way or other, seeking to cast us down? Now, what a child of God wants is to be saved from this unbelief. He knows what a hateful thing it is in the sight of God. Therefore, feeling the workings of this unbelief in his carnal mind, he is desirous to be saved from it. And how saved from it? By the Lord's communicating that precious faith which overcomes it.

The church desires also to be saved from *self in all its various forms*, to be saved from rebellion, from murmuring and fretting against the Lord; from her own wisdom; her own strength and righteousness, to be saved from self in all its various shapes and appearances.

Now, wherever the Lord has put this cry into the soul, "Save, LORD," he will hear that cry. How very short the prayer is! And what makes it short? Extremity! We have not time for long prayers when we are in real distress. Was the prayer of Peter when he was sinking in the water very long? "Lord, save me!" comprehended all; and was he not heard? Does not the Lord say we are not heard for our much speaking? These few words of Peter's pierced the ears and entered into the heart of the Redeemer; he stretched forth his hand, and saved him. The prayer of the thief on the cross was not a long, set prayer, "Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom." But what a prevailing prayer was that! How immediately the expiring Lamb of God said, "Today shalt thou be with me in paradise." The publican who went up to the temple pressed with guilt and shame, was not able to lift up so much as his eyes to heaven. Did he go with a long, set prayer? "God be merciful to me a sinner!" comprehended it all. Was not his prayer heard? Do we not read that "this man

went down to his house justified?" The righteousness of God was imputed to him, and he went home to his house a pardoned, accepted believer. So the words of the text, "Save, LORD." If a man is really enabled to put up these words from a feeling sense of his need of them, as one sinking without them, perishing unless the prayer is heard and answered, that cry never was, never will be, uttered in vain. "Save, LORD!" "Save me from hell; save me from destruction; save me from being overwhelmed in the bottomless pit; save me from the floods of vengeance about to burst upon a guilty world; save me from the guilt of sin; save me from self in all its shapes and forms; save me by applying to my soul, revealing to my heart and conscience, what the Son of God has done upon Calvary."

II. But we pass on to consider the remaining clause of the text: "*Let the king hear us when we call.*" Observe how the church fixes her eyes upon the King; how she traces the Son of God through all the parts of his mediatorial work. "Let the king hear us when we call." Does not this show the equality of the Son with the Father? In the first clause of the text the church says, "Save, LORD," as though she personally addressed herself to the Father; but in the very same verse she adds, "*Let the king hear us when we call.*" Now this may be a relief to some here present. Have not some of you been perplexed on this point, which Person of the Trinity you, should pray to? Sometimes you have prayed to the Father, and then there has been a secret whisper in your heart that you ought to pray to the Son; and when you have done that, you have felt it wrong that you did not pray to the Holy Ghost; and at last you have been so confused as not to know how to pray at all. This is one of Satan's devices to entangle you in prayer, to scatter your thoughts, and confuse your mind, by raising up these perplexing suggestions. But you cannot err if you pray to all the Persons of the Trinity as your

soul is led. If you are led to pray to the Father, pray to the Father; and if led to pray to the Son, pray to the Son; and if led to pray to the Spirit, pray to the Spirit. We have Scriptural instances for all. Paul prays to the Father, (Eph.1:17), "That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him." We have Stephen's prayer to the Son: "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." And we have Paul's prayer to the Spirit: "And the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God, and into the patient waiting for Christ " (2 Thess.3:5), where the name Lord, being distinguished from God the Father and Christ, shows that the blessed Spirit is addressed. Thus the church in the first clause of the text prays to the Father, and in the second clause prays to the Son: "Let the king hear us when we call." She addresses the Lord of life and glory sitting as Monarch over the universe, enthroned as King over God's house at the Father's right hand. This implies that the church has given her heart's adoration to him, that she is a loyal subject, that she has renounced obedience to all former sovereigns; as she confesses in another place, "O LORD our God, other lords beside thee have had dominion over us: but by thee only will we make mention of thy name" (Isa.26:13).

This is the point, then, that the Lord brings his people to. When he listens to their desire for salvation, when he hears their cry, "Save, LORD!" "I am a perishing sinner at thy feet, and can only be saved by thy blood and righteousness, and by the personal application of it to my soul;" when this prayer is heard, when salvation comes, when the conscience is purged, when sin is pardoned, and the believer is translated from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of God's dear Son, he looks up to, he worships, he adores the Son of God as his King. We find this intimated in Psalm 45. "Hearken, O daughter, and consider, and incline thine ear;

forget also thine own people, and thy father's house;" as though the Spirit said, "Turn thy back upon all thy old companions, renounce all thy old allegiance." "So shall the king greatly desire thy beauty: *for he is thy Lord*; and worship thou him." "Thou hast received him as thy Lord; thou art, then, no longer thine own; thou art bought with a price. He is thy Head, thy Husband; he is thy Lord; and worship thou him, adore him, admire him, cleave to him with purpose of heart." So that when the church says, "Let the king hear," it implies that she has believed with her heart in the finished work of Christ; that she has bowed her soul down before the Lord of life and glory, and that she has received him into her soul as the Monarch of her affections.

We see this clearly developed in Thomas. Here was Thomas, as full of infidelity and unbelief as Satan could well fill him. He actually would not believe that Jesus was risen from the dead unless he put his hand into his pierced side. But when the Lord invited him to put his hand into his side, and behold his hands, faith flowed immediately into his conscience, and he fell down before him; light and life took possession of his soul; and his believing heart vented itself in these words: "My Lord and my God." He at that moment received him as his King; he gave him the allegiance of his heart; he owned him as his once crucified, but now risen Lord; and he bowed before him as his eternal and almighty God.

Then when the church says in the text, "Let the king hear us when we call," she speaks of Jesus as her Lord, reigning in her soul, guiding her thoughts, sitting upon her heart as her Monarch and Sovereign, and ruling over her by his own will and Word. But she was in distress and perplexity; there was that in her experience which still made her feel her need, her increasing need of him. Look at her words: "Let the king hear us when we call;" not merely when we pray, when we

ask, when we desire, when we want; but the word "call" implies felt necessity, an extremity that required immediate deliverance. Persons do not call, unless they are in some extremity. We call for help, as a drowning person when he falls into the river; we call for deliverance, as a man set upon by robbers, or as a woman insulted and oppressed, that she may be rescued from her ravisher. Urgent need is therefore implied in the expression, "call." When the church, therefore, says, "Let the king hear us when we call," she means to imply that there are those distresses, those perplexities, which force a cry from her soul. Does not this beat to pieces that vain expectation of our ever arriving at a state that we shall not need the Lord? If the Lord be our Teacher, we shall want him more and more. As we grow weaker and weaker, feebler and feebler; as we get a deeper sight of ourselves, and a higher sight of Jesus, we shall want him more and more every day. Woe be to us, woe be to us, if ever we get to such a state as not to want Christ. Depend upon it, we have got into a land of death, out of the way of the Spirit's work upon our hearts, if we get into such a state as never to want Christ.

"Let the king hear us," the church then says, "when we call." "When our souls are exercised; when we are distressed through the various perplexities that we have to meet with in the way; when we want him to be a present help in time of trouble; let the King then hear us; let our prayers then reach his ears; let our cries then bring down relief from him who is mighty to save." A child of God does not pray for praying's sake; he does not pray, at least when he is under divine teaching, to satisfy conscience, and as a mere matter of form; but, when he is under the power of the spirit of grace and supplications, he prays because he wants a blessing communicated. "Let the king hear us." "let him stretch forth his arm, let him give that blessing which we stand in need of;

let him communicate mercy and peace to our souls; let him not turn a deaf ear, but let him listen to our cry." But does not Jesus always hear? Does he not always listen to the cries of his people? He does; but there is often a feeling in our hearts when he does not immediately answer our requests, that he does not hear us. "How long shall I cry, and thou wilt not hear! even cry out unto thee of violence, and thou wilt not save!" (Hab.1:2). There the prophet was in a state of darkness, and could not believe the Lord heard his prayer. So the church complains in Lamentations: "Thou hast covered thyself with a cloud, that our prayer should not pass through" (3:44). The cloud was so dark, so dense, that her prayer could not pierce through it.

Thus sometimes the fear arises through the delay of the petition. It has been laid at the feet, and presented before the face of the King; but it is long before the answer comes. How many of the Lord's people are tried on this point! They have prayed for years for the manifestation of Christ to their souls, for the pardon of their sins, for the shedding abroad of his love; but it has not yet come down in that sweet power they want to experience. This makes them fear that it never will come again. Guilt in the soul makes us fear that we have sinned so basely against the Lord that he will not hear us. The Lord says, "Your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you" (Isa.59:2). Sometimes such feelings as these work in the mind: "I am such a sinner, so base a wretch; I am so unlike everything that a Christian should be in all I say, think, and do, that the Lord will not hear me." Sometimes through powerful workings of infidelity we may think there is no God to hear. Sometimes we are so full of unbelief as to feel it is of no use praying any longer: "I have prayed so long, and the Lord takes no notice; why should I weary him?" Sometimes we fear that our prayers are a stink in his nostrils, and that

we are like those who "eat swine's flesh, and broth of abominable things is in their vessels."

Under these feelings, therefore, the church says, "Let the king hear us!" "Though our base idols too often steal away our affections; though our traitorous lusts run off with our carnal minds, yet our hearts are still with the King." The citadel still remains secure. Though the soldiers of the enemy are running through the streets of the city, yet the heart, the garrison, the inmost, deepest affections of the soul still remain loyal and obedient to the King of kings, to whom they have sworn allegiance. Therefore she says, "Let the king hear us!" We have indeed treated him basely; we have departed from him; we have sinned against him; we have longed after other kings; our carnal affections have gone out towards other lovers; and we have been the basest of all wretches towards him. Yet we want him still to rule and reign in our souls. There is some beating of the tender affections of our hearts towards him, and we cannot bear the thought that he should leave us altogether, and never give us a glimpse of his glory and beauty again. The devil has not got possession of the garrison. He has not pulled down the King's throne, and driven allegiance out of the heart. Christ is still our King. Though we confess to our shame and sorrow that there are many traitorous lusts in our hearts, that would, if allowed, sell the garrison into the hands of the enemy, yet it still remains firm to the King. We need him; nobody else can do us any good, all other brooks are dry, and all cisterns broken. The King alone can do us good; he only can save us, bless us, and make us rejoice in his love; shield us in his bosom from our enemies; bestow his loving kindness on our hearts; make us happy here, and take us to endless bliss hereafter. Then "let the king hear us when we call" when ravishers are assaulting us; when these renegades are running through the streets; when these lusts, like so many

of his and our enemies, are lively and strong, let him manifest himself; let him scatter our enemies; let him come and take possession of our hearts and affections, and reveal himself as our King and Sovereign.

Now is not this the feeling of a living soul, to be full of shame and sorrow, full of self-condemnation at being such a wretch; and yet it cannot give up Jesus? Though at the ends of the earth, to be longing, looking, languishing after, and desiring him; deserving indeed to be cast into hell, yet coveting a place in heaven; often serving Satan, and yet wanting to lean upon the bosom of the King of kings; often lusting after the devil's delicacies, and yet wanting to be fed with meat from the King's table? "Save, LORD;" for none but thou can save such a wretch. "Let the king hear us when we call " in extremity, in distress, in shame, in sorrow. "Let the king hear us," not slight our petitions; not turn his offended face away, and say, "I will give thee up;" but rather, "How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? how shall I deliver thee, Israel? how shall I make thee as Admah? how shall I set thee as Zeboim? mine heart is turned within me; my repentings are kindled together" (Hos.11:8). "I will not give thee up, Ephraim." "Though he is a rebellious child; though he has proved himself a transgressor from the womb, I cannot give him up, because I have loved him." Therefore, the King having died for his church, and having done such a mighty work for her, he cannot, he will not, give her up, but he will save her with an everlasting salvation, and prove to her that where sin hath abounded, grace doth "much more abound."