

Golden Bowls Full Of Incense

by C.H. Spurgeon

C.H. Spurgeon teaches that the prayers of true saints, though imperfect in themselves, are made sweet and acceptable to God through the intercession and merit of Jesus Christ.

Scripture: Revelation 5:8, John 4:24, 1 John 1:9, John 15:7, James 5:16

Topics: "Prayer", "Intercession", "Sanctification"

Description

In 'Golden Bowls Full Of Incense,' C.H. Spurgeon explores the profound symbolism of the prayers of saints as golden bowls filled with fragrant incense before God's throne. He emphasizes that while human prayers are imperfect and often flawed, they are made acceptable through the intercession and merit of Jesus Christ. Spurgeon warns against empty ritualistic prayers and calls believers to offer heartfelt, sanctified, and faith-filled supplications. This devotional sermon encourages Christians to cultivate a holy character and sincere worship in their prayer life.

Transcript

BY C. H. SPURGEON,

"Golden vials full of incense, which are the prayers of saints." Revelation 5:8.

I SHOULD not have addressed you upon the subject of intercession today if this week had not been set apart for general prayer, for it was only two Sabbaths ago that I endeavored to set before you the duty and privilege of intercession [Sermon #1049, Intercessory Prayer.] However, as our mind is now directed to it again, it may be that the line upon line, the precept upon precept, the here a little and there a little, may not be without benefit to us. The vision before us is a very remarkable one. We do not intend, for we have not the time, to go into all the details of it. No doubt it is a vision referring to some special occasion, but at the same time we may regard it as descriptive of the usual worship which is offered before the Throne of God and the Lamb.

We have sometimes in continental galleries seen a mediaeval painting representing the assembly of the great council of the ancient German Empire. There is the emperor surrounded by the various kings, princes, electors, dukes, and counts. Yonder are the knights of the Golden Fleece. There are the bishops and the cardinals, the barons, knights, and burghers of various degrees making up a marvelous spectacle of pomp and pageantry. If we made minute enquiries we should, perhaps, discover the one particular Diet which the picture represented—but even without such investigation the painting is instructive—we know

that if it represents the Diet on one occasion, the one might stand for all.

And so in the great assembly of Heaven, the outline which the seer of Patmos gives us here may, if we wish to be very accurate, be referred to some one particular event. But it will suffice for us to believe that it represents in general the homage which is rendered at the Throne of the Eternal. In considering the brilliant scene before us, note carefully that the worship described is not confined to the occupants of Heaven's immediate courts. Moses Stuart, believing that we have here an entirely celestial scene, concludes that these, "golden vials full of incense, which are the prayers of saints," represent the intercessions of glorified spirits.

He makes the remark that the saints in Heaven still continue to pray. To this last statement I do not object, for in the sixth chapter the souls under the altar are said to cry for vengeance, and I see no reason why the perfect saints above should not pray. But I very greatly question whether we can draw that inference from this particular passage, for the prayers here intended are not those of Heaven only, since from the 13th verse we are taught that the scene represents the adoration of the Lamb by the entire universe. "Every creature which is in Heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, heard I saying, Blessing, and honor, and glory, and power be unto Him that sits upon the Throne, and unto the Lamb forever and ever."

The presence angels lead the strain. The saints made perfect join the rapturous hallelujah, and then 10,000 times 10,000 angels swell the growing strain. Meanwhile, from every starry orb comes up its note of worship and the firmament rings with music. Earth from afar has heard the sound and wakens all her life to take its part in the harmony! The fowls of the air and the fish of the sea, the songsters of the forest and the monsters of the deep render with zeal their tribute of grateful praise. 'Tis not the inner circle, alone, which thus resounds Jehovah's praise but widening and widening, the praise encompasses all space and fills immensity! Not Heaven alone, but all creation yields the Lord His praise.

Now, dear Brothers and Sisters, let us, by faith, pass into the inner circle, draw near to the Throne of God and gaze upon the golden vials full of incense, for with these we have to do this morning. It is probably known to all of you that the idea conveyed to us, by "golden vials," is as far removed from the meaning of the Greek word as well could be, for a vial is to us generally a deep but narrow vessel. But the vessel here meant is both shallow and broad. A better rendering would be "golden bowls," or "golden goblets full of incense which are the prayers of saints." The idea is that each one of

the 24 elders bears an open bowl or censor filled with smoking incense which pours forth a sweet perfume before the Lord—and this is the symbol of the supplications of the people of God.

Leaving the figure, the thoughts before us are just these. The prayers of God's people are sweet as incense to Him. Secondly, their blended prayers are peculiarly acceptable in His sight. And, therefore, thirdly, let us unite our supplications with the general prayer.

I. THE PRAYERS OF GOD'S PEOPLE ARE AS SWEET TO HIM AS INCENSE. This is not due to any natural excellence or merit which they possess in themselves and by themselves. Far from it. In the best prayer that was ever offered by the holiest man that ever lived, there was enough sin in it to render it a polluted thing if the Lord had looked upon it by itself. When we approach nearest to the Throne of Grace, we still fall very far short of being where and what we ought to be. The sins of our holiest thoughts are, alone, enough to condemn us! We often come before God in prayer unfit to pray, and spoil the action in the very outset by having an unprepared heart.

At other times, when we are in the midst of devotion—when we are being borne up upon the wings of zeal, pride will intrude—and we congratulate ourselves upon the excellence of our worship. Alas, one dash of that spirit mars all—it is the Pharisaic spirit, and is the bane of devotion. At other times, just as our supplication is closing, we are assailed with suspicions as to the faithfulness of God—doubts as to the success of our pleas—or else some other unhallowed thought pollutes the sacrifice. Alas, how hard it is to begin, continue, and end a prayer in the Spirit! If any one of our prayers were put into the scales of the sanctuary, alone and of itself, the only verdict upon it must be it is weighed in the balances and found wanting.

No, my Brothers and Sisters, the prayers of the saints, of themselves considered, would rather be an offense unto Divine holiness than a sweet savor unto God. Our consolation lies in this—that our beloved Intercessor who stands before God for us, even Christ Jesus—possesses such an abundance of precious merit that He puts fragrance into our supplications and imparts a delicious aroma to our prayers! He makes our intercessions to be, through His merit, what they could not have been without it—acceptable before the Majesty of Heaven. I think it is Ambrose who uses a very pretty figure concerning Believers' prayers. He says we are like little children who run into the garden to gather flowers to please their father, but we are so ignorant and childish that we pluck as many weeds as flowers—and some of them very noxious! And then we carry this strange mixture in our hands, thinking that such base weeds would be acceptable to

Him!

The mother meets the child at the door, and she says to it, "Little One, you know not what you have gathered." She unbinds this mixture and takes from it all the weeds and leaves only the sweet flowers. And then she takes other flowers sweeter than those which the child has plucked and inserts them instead of the weeds. And then she puts back the perfect bouquet into the child's hand, and it runs with it to its father. Jesus Christ, in more than motherly tenderness, thus deals with our supplications. If we could see one of our prayers after Christ Jesus has amended it, we should scarcely know it again! He has such skill that even our good flowers grow fairer in His hands. We clumsily tied them into a bundle but He arranges them into a fair bouquet, where each beauty enhances the charm of its neighbor.

If I could see my prayer after the Lord has prayed it, I should miss so much, and I should find so much there that was not mine that I am sure its fullest acceptance with God would not cause me a moment's pride but rather make me blush with grateful humility before Him whose boundless sweetness lent to me and my poor prayer a sweetness not my own. So then, though the prayers of God's saints are as precious incense, they would never be a sweet smell unto God were it not that they are accepted in the Beloved! Note well that true, acceptable intercession must be composed of the prayers of saints. "Golden bowls full of the prayers of saints."

Nothing is here said of the prayers of officials, hirelings, and functionaries. It is thought most important by some Churches that there should be kept up a daily repetition of certain words and sounds. This is not done by persons selected for their eminent spirituality or prevalence in prayer, but by officials whose appointment is arranged on very different principles. These persons are not qualified for the function in their ordinary dress, but derive some mystic qualification from garments more or less savoring of the bleaching starch of the laundry. Then, having certain words before them, they have nothing to do but with appointed bows and scrapes to go through them—and in going through them they believe they have offered unto God acceptable prayer!

I have always been expecting to hear that before long praying to God would come to be managed by machinery. Our friends have, for a considerable time, praised God in that way—and a little inventiveness might surely arrange the same for prayer! There is now scarcely a place of worship dedicated to Christian worship but what the most of the praise to God is done by an organization of wind and pedals—sometimes with the addition of electricity—and doubtless it is quite as consistent. And they surely would believe it quite as acceptable to God, too, that we commence to pray by wind, or water, or fire, or magnetism, or, better still, by steam! I cannot see why what is done in many cathedrals and churches by machines which eat bread and meat, could not as equally be well done by engines consuming coal and coke. The making of sounds is a mechanical business and needs only a little attention, and we might soon have a whole service performed by figures filled with clock-work.

There is a certain note of the organ called *vox humana* which certainly is amazingly like the human voice, and as long as you have no need of heart and soul, it cannot matter much whether the sound is made by the *vox humana* of an organ or the real human voice. The fact is, vocal prayers are nothing in themselves, whether they are said or sung, whether they are read or intoned—it is the heart which alone prays acceptably. I cannot believe in a God who finds any satisfaction in the ritualistic services which I have witnessed. I have asked myself, "What kind of a being must he be who could find pleasure in this sort of thing?" Thought is disgusted, reason sickened, intellect provoked, contemplation annoyed—only a fligid taste and a childish love of display are gratified. The God of these Popish ceremonialists must surely be a huge, almighty doll-loving baby—certainly not an intelligent Being, such as Scripture reveals to us in the God that made Heaven and earth!

Alas, the frivolous sons of men imagine, because they go to their operas and listen to sweet music, and because in their drawing rooms they delight in the perfume which they scatter from their handkerchiefs, and because they are pleased to array themselves in silk and satin and the like, that God is like themselves, and is pleased with chants, and robes, and incense! Truly, the God they make is like themselves! They do not know the ever-blessed Lord! If He would be adored with glittering blue, look at the azure of the sky, or the deep blue of the sea! If He would be worshipped with lamps and candles, behold yon stars, and sun, and moon! If He would be revered with music, hark how the thunder rolls like drums in His awful march!

Is the Infinite mind to be worshipped by vain shows? O you sons of earth, will you thus worship Him that rides on the heavens, before Whom you all are but as grasshoppers? The prayers which the Lord accepts are not the chants of functionaries, the litanies of priests, or the devout tones of a mechanical service—they must be the prayers of saints! The sweetness lies in the life, the character, the soul! The acceptance comes not unless they are the prayers of saints! And who are the saints? They are men and women whom the Lord has made holy by the power of His Spirit. They are those whose nature He has purified. They are those whom He has washed in the precious blood of Jesus and so sanctified unto Himself! He has filled them with His Spirit and so set apart to His worship.

These persons love Him, praise Him, bow before Him with solemn awe! They lift their whole souls up in adoring love—these are they who can offer sweet incense—their thoughts, their desires, their longing, their confessions, their pleading, their praises—these are sweet to God! This is music to Him! This is perfume to His heart! This is delightful to His infinite mind, pleasant to His sacred Spirit—for God is a Spirit and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth—and after no other fashion is a spiritual God to be worshipped!

Then, in the matter of intercession, one of the most important things is the character of the person. If I live in constant sin and then go and say, "Our Father, which are in Heaven," surely I might feel His hand closing my mouth while I hear Him say, "How can you speak so? How dare you say, 'Hallowed be Your name,' when you do constantly defile it? How can you say, 'Your kingdom come,' when you will not submit to My rule, nor yield allegiance to My government? How dare you mutter out before Me the words, 'Your will be done on earth, as it is in Heaven,' when you rebel against My will, and set up your own will instead of Mine."

Such prayers—what would they be but an insult to the Hearer, instead of sweet perfume offered before the Most High? Yes, and note too, my Brethren—and I would note it myself with deep solemnity—that even where the man who presents intercessory prayer is a child of God, yet, unless he maintains, in the power of God's Spirit, his character as a saint, he will not preserve the prevalence of his prayers. For though our heavenly Father does not hear our prayers because of any merit in us, yet it is written, "If you abide in Me, and My Words abide in you, you shall ask what you will,

and it shall be done unto you." If we turn aside from the Lord's commands we shall lose power in prayer and our petitions will cease to bring down answers of peace.

It is certain that every child of God who has watched it will know that there is nothing which so weakens prayer as sin, and that to be a man like Elijah, who can prevail with God upon Carmel, you must walk in the Lord's ways. If you walk contrary to Him, He will walk contrary to you. In the golden bowls the sweet incense is not the prayers of hypocrites or formalists, but the prayers of saints. We must, by the Spirit's power, maintain the saintly character. We must walk apart from worldliness and covetousness. We must put aside uncleanness, anger, wrath, and every evil thing, or else we shall not be able to present unto the Lord such sweet odors as He delights in.

Note next that these prayers must be compounded of precious Divine Graces, for they are compared to incense, and, as you know, the incense used in the Temple was made up of many sweet spices, compounded, "according to the work of the apothecary." Stacte and onycha, and galbanum were mixed with pure frankincense, tempered together and beaten small. Now, in prayer, that which is sweet to God is not the words used, though they ought to be appropriate and care should be taken with the language, which is as the golden bowl. But the sweetness lies not in anything perceptible to the outward senses, but in secret qualities, comparable to the essence and aroma of sweet spices. In the incense there lies a subtle and almost spiritual essence which is fetched forth from it by the burning coals which causes the latent sweetness to spread itself abroad till all around confesses its power.

So it is in prayer. Beloved Brothers and Sisters, our prayers may be very comely in appearance, and, if printed, might read most correctly and appear to be the very paragon of devotion, but unless there is a secret spiritual force in them they are vain things! We must speak to God believing that He is, and that He is the Rewarder of them that diligently seek Him. Faith must be a part of the savor of prayer. Now I am not able to tell, when I hear a Brother pray, whether he prays in faith or not, any more than I might, with my eyes, be able to tell whether what is presented to me as incense has in it the proper pungency. But God perceives the faith or the absence of it, and the prayer is received or rejected as the case may be.

So, too, in prayer there must be the true frankincense of love. How can I pray as a child to a Father whom I do not love? If my heart is cold towards God my prayer will be frozen to death. There is need, moreover, of the Grace of humility to be mixed, like precious stacte, with the other ingredients—for he who does not

pray humbly will be no more justified than the Pharisee. There was much of this precious spice in the publican's prayer, when he dared not lift so much as his eyes towards Heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, "God be merciful to me, a sinner." Much of this ought to lie in every prayer. But I cannot stay to tell you what all the separate spices ought to be which are necessary to make up the incense of an acceptable prayer. Only let me remind you that the incense of the Temple was mingled "according to the art of the apothecary."

Let us bless God that the Holy Spirit is the Believer's Apothecary. He it is who knows the proper quantity of each ingredient in prayer—how much of faith, how much of love, how much of repentance, how much of humility there ought to be in every supplication. He helps each Believer's infirmities and makes for us a mixture of all choice Graces so that when we pray our pleadings are accepted as sweet incense because they contain an harmonious amalgamation of all the things which are sweet to the Lord God of Sabaoth. In passing onward, let us observe that this incense, in order to be accepted before God, must burn. It might be the best incense in the world. It might be well compounded and put into the golden bowls—but it was never accepted by God till it was set on fire.

Live coals must be taken from off the altar and applied to the spices, and then the clouds of the sweet smoke began to rise up towards Heaven. Ah, Brethren, here many men's prayers fail! They are correct but cold, excellent but lifeless. They lack life, vigor, earnestness—fire! Some make up for this deficiency by noise and wild-fire, but it will not do. The Holy Spirit alone can give us true fervor. I confess that I have too often prayed in this pulpit and have not used the holy violence which wins with Heaven. And in our Prayer Meetings I have heard excellent supplications which have failed only in this—that the living fire had never touched them. How often in the family we go through the usual petitions, praying for ourselves and for the Church of God, and for the heathen, and so on—and then we go our way.

We knelt down mechanically and we continued there mechanically, and we rose up mechanically, and though the prayer was extemporaneous, yet I fear there is no more heart in it than if we had read it from a book! Remember well this Truth of God—that neither extemporaneous prayer nor any other is of any use unless holy fire consume it! We must have

the live coals! I have heard prayers made up of broken, fragmentary, ill-assorted sentences—but the man who presented them has been all alive—and I have blessed God and felt I could say, "Amen, amen, the Lord hear that Brother's petition." Beloved, have you not gone to your closet and felt, "I have only one thing upon my mind, but oh, how heavily that weighs upon me! I could not construct an elaborate prayer if it were to save my life, for I am so distressed about that one thing"?

But then, that one petition has poured forth from you with all your soul and you have been heard concerning it. The Lord teach us to pray in earnest! May He send upon the continent of Europe, and upon America, and upon all the world at this time His own fire and the heavenly flame of His Spirit, the Spirit of Grace and of supplication—that saints may know how to pray—for we must have the fire with the incense! Then the fire, being with the incense, it was necessary for acceptance that it should ascend. If the wind had blown the smoke of the incense downward, scattering it to the right and to the left, it would have been an ill omen. The incense was accepted with God as it went straight up into the air, mounting till it seemed to join the clouds and lose itself.

Brothers and Sisters, our intercessions, when they are sweet to God, go straight up to Him. Do your prayers always do that? Have you ever prayed thinking, "Well, that is a very nice expression which I have

used. My learned Brethren will be pleased with that. My spiritual friends will be able to join in that and they will think, "What a spiritual man he is to pray as he is now doing." Ah, my Brother, the smoke is blowing down, you see—blowing away towards man's nostrils, and not towards God. So much waste and only waste! The prayer which God accepts is offered to Him alone. He who presents it cares not one atom who likes it or who does not like it—he is talking with his God—he is pleading with the Majesty unseen! He is very careless of the criticism of his fellow creature—his only desire is to please the Lord. The prayers of the Churches will never be accepted before God until they go straight up to Him, only, having respect to Him who is invisible.

Now the question returns, why are the prayers of saints so sweet to God? We reply, partly because they are the work of the Spirit of God. There is no acceptable prayer in the world but that which the Spirit of God has inspired. The Holy Spirit knows what the mind of God is, and He writes it upon the minds of God's people, "making intercession in the saints according to the will of God." Now, when God sees His own will reflected in the bosoms of His own children, He cannot but accept the work of His own Spirit. The prayers of His saints are acceptable with Him, also, because they are the pleadings of His Son. The saints are members of Christ's body, and, as they plead, Christ pleads in them. The very strength of their pleading lies in this—that they urge His merits—and the Lord delights to be reminded of His Son's excellences—it is a theme that He delights in.

You may ring that bell as long as you ever will—the Father will never weary of it. Tell Him what His Son has done. Remind Him of Gethsemane. Bring up before the Father's mind the Cross of Calvary. Tell Him of His promise to His Son—that He shall see His seed and have a full reward. You cannot by any possibility displease God by dwelling upon this topic. Hold Him with it, yes, hold Him with the resolution of a Jacob, and say, "I will not let You go until You bless me, for I plead the name and merit of Your only begotten Son." Everything about Christ is sweet to God, and because Believers' prayers are full of Christ, therefore they are sweet to God.

And, again, the prayers of the saints are sweet to God because they honor Him, and this they do in many ways— first, they assert His existence. In prayer the people of God declare better than they could by any other means their sure belief that God is, for should we pray to One who has no existence? Our prayer to God, therefore, is our continual assertion that, "The Lord, He is God," "The Lord, He is God." Our asking for special and particular mercies, and expecting them, is a declaration of our belief in a living God, a conscious God, an acting God, a God who is not asleep and far away, but who is near at hand listening to human voices and able to fulfill human desires. This, then, is very agreeable to God that we should believe and testify that He is, and that He is the Rewarder of them that diligently seek

Him.

What if I were to say that prayer is, in itself, essentially a doxology? It is an utterance of glory to God in His attributes. Do I ask Him to bless me? Then I adore His power, for I believe He can. Do I ask Him to bless me? Then I adore His mercy, for I trust and hope He will. Do I ask Him to bless me because of such and such a promise? Then I adore His faithfulness, for I evidently believe that He is truthful and will do as He has said. Do I ask Him to bless me not according to my request, but according to His own wisdom? Then I adore His wisdom. I am evidently believing in His

prudence and judgment. I say to Him, "Not my will but Yours be done"—I am adoring His Sovereignty. When I confess that I deserve to suffer beneath His hand, I reverence His justice. When I acknowledge

that He does right evermore, I adore His holiness. And, when I humbly say, "Nevertheless, deal graciously with Your servant and blot out my transgressions," I am reverencing His Grace. We do not wonder, therefore, that through Jesus Christ the prayers of the saints should be precious to God, since they are a homage to the Supreme of an eminently practical kind.

Brothers and Sisters, after all, perhaps the best reason we can ever give why God loves to hear us pray, is one which comes home to our own hearts. You love to hear your own little children's talk. Now you know very well when your little girl wants a new dress, and you are well aware that your little boy needs fresh school books—there is no necessity whatever that Mary should inform you about her clothes, or that Master John should tell you about his books—for you know what they had need of long before they ask you. But you like them to feel their needs and to recognize that they are supplied by their father—and, therefore, you like to hear them express their desires.

Sometimes you will stop a bit and say, "No, why should I give you this?" You set them a pleading because you like to hear their little prattling voices and to have them put their little arms around your neck and overcome you with kisses. You let them believe that they master you with their pretty reasoning and fond embraces, and it is pleasant to you as well as to them. Now, our heavenly Father is far above us, and yet He bids us learn His Character from our own feelings as parents. If we, being evil, know how to give good gifts to our children, how much more shall our heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him? The Lord declares that He deals with us as with children.

I know the next word is, "For what son is there whom his father chastens not?" But I do not believe that God's likeness to a father is limited to His chastening. The text cannot be so cross and crabbed as that. Oh no, there is a likeness to a father in His hearing our cries! He loves communion with His people. The Lord loves to have the hearts of His children talk to Him. He delights to hear them spread out their needs before Him and order their case with arguments and prevail with them. Oh, then never be slack in your pleadings which are pleasant to God as fragrant incense!

II. Now, secondly and briefly, BLENDED PRAYERS ARE PECULIARLY ACCEPTABLE TO GOD. "The prayers of saints." The prayers of a saint are sweet, but the prayers of saints are sweeter! I had many points here, but I think I must forego them all this morning for the sake of one. United prayers possess the power of harmony. In music there is melody in any one distinct note—but we have all recognized a peculiar charm in harmony.

Now, the prayers of one saint are to God melody, but the intercessions of many are harmony—and to God there is much that is pleasing in the harmony of His people's prayers. Let us turn the subject over a minute. No two children of God pray exactly alike. There is a difference of tone. If taught of God, each one will pray graciously, but there will be in one prayer what there is not in another. If all the fruits of the garden are luscious, yet each one has its own special flavor. All the bells may be of silver, and yet each one will have its own tone.

For instance, some Brothers and Sisters, when they pray, dwell very tenderly upon the dishonor done to God by sin. They pray as if their hearts would break and they weep at every other sentence. "O God, the idols are placed on Your Throne. Jesus is dishonored, the Law is broken, the Gospel is despised." Such loving contrition for the sin of others wails itself out in soft, low notes of magic power. But, listen to others, and you will find their prayers pitched upon quite another key. The Brother prays with full assurance that God's kingdom is established upon the mountains, where its foundation can never be

removed. And though the heathens rage, and the people imagine vain things, yet surely God's kingdom and purpose will stand and He will do all His pleasure.

And as you hear such petitioning, shrill and clear like the sound of a trumpet, you feel that the voice of faith is both musical and prevalent. The man has no doubt as to God's triumphing! He is quite certain that the Lord's hosts will win the day, and He prays in that spirit. Now, if these varying tones are melted into one, what masterly harmony they make! Therefore the Lord promises great things when two of us agree as touching anything concerning His kingdom. But, now comes in a third petitioner, and his tone of prayer differs from the other two. The same spirit of prayer is in him, but its voice varies. He prays in this way. Bowed down with a sense of awe in the Presence of God, the God of all the earth, he seems to speak measuring out each word, and he cries, "O God, shall not the nations fear You? Such an One as You are, shall they not tremble in Your Presence? Will You not be king to them, O You Creator and Preserver of all things?"

Like the cherubim, he veils his face in the Presence of the excellent Glory, and your soul, by his prayer, is solemnly ushered into the Presence of God and laid prostrate there. But mark yet this fourth man, whose prayer is of another

mold—he is familiar with the Lord—he seems to have merged his sense of the sublime in that of the condescending, and he speaks somewhat in this way—"O Lord, my Father. You love the sons of men. Will You not come and meet Your prodigal sons who are coming back to You? Have You not given Jesus Christ to be a Man and bought men with Your precious blood? And will You not come to them and press them to Your bosom, and make them Yours?" As the Brother calls on God he appears to come close to Him and lay hold upon Him, and say, "I beseech You have mercy upon my fellow men."

Now, there is something blessed in both those prayers. I do not know which I prefer, but I do know, when I can get the blending of the two, the awe and the holy boldness, the familiarity and the sense of sovereignty, I find a double sweetness fills my heart! Ah, Brothers and Sisters, did you ever hear a prayer of that kind which moved the Lord's heart in the wilderness—I refer to the prayer of Moses, when he said, "If not, blot my name out of the Book of Life." This is the prayer of self-sacrifice, when the man feels, "I must have God glorified. I must have these people saved. I would pawn my soul for it. I would lose myself if but this nation might be redeemed." That is grand praying—it is not all of us who can rise to it! If that were alone and the only prayer, it might grow monotonous, for it lacks compass, but, if you put all these prayers together which I have mentioned—the prayers of the tender and the prayers of the brave, the prayers of the awe-struck and the prayers of the familiar, the prayers of the importunate, the prayers of the self-sacrificing—then they fill the golden bowl full of sweet incense!

For my part, I love, at Prayer Meetings, to hear the prayers of the aged. There is a lack in our Prayer Meetings, and has been for some months through the loss of one dear saint whose prayers used to be marrow and fatness to some of our souls on Monday evenings. The prayers of men on the verge of Heaven are to us as angels to lead us, also, up to the gates of pearl. But it is very pleasant to hear the prayers of young people, also, even the very young, for as they talk before the Lord there is a charming simplicity and frankness too little found in others. And then, the prayers of men in middle life, full of experimental trouble, or, on the other hand, overflowing with experienced joy! These have their peculiar aroma, and I believe God loves to see them all mixed in the golden bowls!

And, what if I add He would have His people, with their various peculiarities put their prayers together? I, as a Calvinist, remark that our Arminian friends pray wonderfully Calvinistic! I can seldom perceive difference between them and ourselves, but no doubt they do view more than we do some particular parts of the Truth of God. We, on the other hand, pay a higher regard to another part of Truth. Now these various constitutions of Christians affect, in some degree, their prayers. And when they are blended they give a peculiar harmony of sweetness to the incense. At this time it is delightful to my thoughts to think that the prayers of different nationalities are being put into the golden bowl!

Our French Brothers and Sisters always charm me when they pray. There is a tender, filial love—an affectionate gentleness which is most delicious. Our American friends, so bold and sanguine, also delight us with their confidence in God. Their prayers will balance somewhat the timidity of the French utterance. Then, our German Brethren, with their deep thoughtfulness, and their habit of going to the bottom of things—how solidly they make supplication! So with all our Brothers and Sisters of many lands, what a choice amalgam they make!

I have been present at Prayer Meetings when I have heard the various nations pray, and my heart has rejoiced, and I can conceive that to God there is a peculiar harmony in the blended prayers of the many peoples and tongues. Look back and think of the prayers of all the ages as being in the golden bowl at this one time. The prayers of the Apostles, the cries of the persecuted times, the wrestling of the lonely ones of the Middle Ages, the moans from the valleys and mountains of Piedmont—the groans of our Brothers and Sisters during the Marian persecution, the pleadings of Covenanters and of Puritans—all in the golden bowl together! And all with the live coals upon them, coming up from the hand of the great Covenant Angel who stands for them before the Throne, pleading with God on the behalf of His people! Let us rejoice that the blended prayers of the Church are very sweet to the eternal God.

III. And now, lastly, Brothers and Sisters, LET US BLEND OUR PRAYERS, however faulty and feeble they may

be, with the general supplications of the period. If united prayer is sweet to God, and we are sure it is, O let us give Him much of it! We cannot make God happier than He is in reality, for He is the infinitely happy God. But yet, if there is anything concerning which He expresses satisfaction, let us abound in it! O Church of God, cry day and night unto Him! If your voice, O Spouse, is sweet in His ears—if He says, "Let Me hear your voice. Let Me see your face, for sweet is your

voice and your countenance is comely," O turn not away your face and let not your voice be silent! But cry, and even in the night watches pour out your heart like water before the Lord your God!

We fail, I am afraid, we Dissenters, in devotion very much because we do not value it aright. In the service of today, I believe the sermon to be a very important part. But I do not believe, as some do, that it is the all-important matter. I have heard friends say, "So-and-so will take the preliminary service," as if our praying and singing were only a little preliminary affair to be gotten through, and the preaching was the great concern. But, my Brethren, praying is the end of preaching—the preaching is only the stalk—the real ear is the devotion which we pay to God. Let us see to this, and seeing God is pleased with prayer, offer it to Him more and more. And remember that if we do so, we shall find a blessing in it ourselves. The more we pray, the more we shall need to pray—the more we pray, the more we can pray—the more we pray, the more we shall pray. He who prays little will pray less, but he who prays much will pray more—and he who prays more will desire to pray more abundantly.

And, dearly Beloved, remember that prayer is effectual with God. We want to see souls saved. Are we not getting weary of living in this world among so many who are going down to Hell? Is it not terrible to think that after all the Church is doing, thousands are being lost every day? We ought to bestir ourselves for men's souls and we cannot do better for them than praying for them. Let us, therefore, bestir ourselves in prayer! In the eighth chapter of the Revelation you will find that the great angel who stood before God with the golden censer in his hand, full of the prayers of the saints, held it up and the smoke went up to God.

But, after a while, when the incense was all burnt out, he took that golden censer and he filled it with coals from off the altar, and then you notice what he did—he emptied the golden censer out upon the earth, and there were voices and thunders and lightning and earthquakes. Read the passage. Now, when the censer of God's Church shall have been well filled with prayer, and that prayer shall have been presented to the Lord, He will begin to work, and that censer which has been before God a weapon to prevail with Him, shall then become against men a weapon to prevail with them! God will fill it full of coals and pour it out upon the earth. His Divine power shall then be seen. Then will come voices—preachers here and there will rise, in the newspaper press, in the universities, in the public assemblies—there will be voices denouncing oppression, voices crying against priestcraft, voices preaching the Truth of God—voices declaring

Christ!

Then will come thunder, for with the Gospel will go the voice of God, which is like thunder, louder than the voice of man. Then will flash forth lightning, for the light of God's power and Truth will come forth with majesty, and men's hearts shall be smitten with it, and made obedient to it. And then shall earthquakes shake society till the thrones of despots reel—till hoary customs are dashed in pieces—till the land that could not be plowed with the Gospel plow shall be broken up with secret heaviness from the eternal God!

We have but to pray! All things are possible to us! Pray, Brothers and Sisters! You have the key in the door of Heaven, keep it there and turn it till the gate shall open. Pray, Brethren, for prayer holds the chain which binds the old dragon! Prayer can hold fast and restrain even Satan himself! Pray! God girds you with omnipotence if you know how to pray! May we not fail here, but may the Spirit of God strengthen us, and to God shall be glory forever and ever. Amen.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/ch-spurgeon/golden-bowls-full-of-incense/>

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