

The Poor Man's Prayer

by C.H. Spurgeon

C.H. Spurgeon passionately teaches that sincere, humble prayer for personal salvation is a blessed sign of God's work in the heart, offering hope to believers, backsliders, and seekers alike.

Scripture: Psalm 106:4-5, 2 Chronicles 16:9, Isaiah 66:2, Luke 10:30-37, Mark 9:24, Luke 15:11-32, Luke 23:42

Topics: "Prayer", "Salvation", "Backsliding"

Description

In 'The Poor Man's Prayer,' C.H. Spurgeon explores the heartfelt prayer of Psalm 106:4-5 as a model for humble believers, penitent backsliders, and seeking sinners. He emphasizes the importance of personal, earnest prayer for salvation and God's favor, encouraging all to trust in God's remembrance and grace. This devotional sermon offers comfort and hope to those struggling with doubt, sin, or spiritual longing, inviting them to find peace in Christ's redeeming love.

Transcript

"Remember me, O Lord, with the favor that You bear unto Your people: O visit me with Your salvation; that I may see the good of Your chosen, that I may rejoice in the gladness of Your nation, that I may glory with Your inheritance." Psalm 106:4,5.

BELOVED, we always reckon it a very hopeful sign when a man begins to think of personal religion. Merely to come with the crowd and professedly to worship is but poor work. But when a man gets to feel the weight of his own sin and to confess it with his heart before God—when he wants a Savior for himself and begins to pray alone that he may find that Savior—when he is not content with being the child of pious parents, or with having been introduced into the Church in his childhood after the fashion of certain sects. When he pines for real godliness, personal religion, true conversion—it is a blessed sign, indeed! When a stag separates itself from the herd, we reckon that the dart has struck home—the wound is grievous and the creature seeks solitude—for a bleeding heart cannot bear company. Blessed are God's woundings, for they lead to a heavenly healing!

We are still more glad when this desire for personal salvation leads a man to prayer—when he really begins to cry out before God on his own account—when he has done with the prayers he used to repeat by rote like a parrot and bursts out with the language of his heart! Though that language may be very broken, or consist only of sighs and tears and groans, it is a happy circumstance. "Behold, he prays" was enough for Ananias—he was sure that Paul must be converted! And when we find a man praying and praying earnestly for personal salvation, we feel that this is the finger of God and our heart is glad within

us!

The passage before us is one of those earnest personal supplications which we love to hear from any lips. I will read it again and then proceed to use it in two or three ways. "Remember me, O Lord, with the favor that You bear unto Your people: O visit me with Your salvation; that I may see the good of Your chosen, that I may rejoice in the gladness of Your nation, that I may glory with Your inheritance." Now, first, this is a very suitable prayer for the humble Believer—it was a humble Believer who first uttered it. Next, it would make a very suitable petition for a penitent backslider. And, thirdly, it would be a very sweet Gospel prayer for a seeker. May the Spirit of God bless the Word to each of these characters.

I. First, then, this is an admirable prayer for a poor humble Christian. I think I can hear him using the very words. Notice with interest the first fear felt by this poor trembling Christian. He is afraid that he is such a little one that God will forget him and so he begins with, "O remember me with the favor which You bear to Your people." I know this man well. I think very much of him, but he thinks very little of himself. I admire his humility, but he often complains that he feels pride in his heart. He is a true Believer, but he is a sad doubter. Poor man, he often hangs his head, for he has such a sense of his own unworthiness. I only wish he had an equal sense of Christ's fullness to balance his humility.

He is on the road to Heaven, but he is often afraid he is not and that makes him watch every step he takes. I almost wish some confident professors were altogether as doubtful as he is if they would be half as cautious. He is afraid to put one foot before another lest he should go wrong and yet he mourns his lack of watchfulness! He is always complaining of the hardness of his heart and yet he is tenderness itself! Dear Soul—you should hear him pray! His prayers are among the most earnest and blessed you ever listened to, but when he is finished, he is afraid he never ought to have opened his mouth. He is not fit to pray before others, he says. He thinks his prayers the poorest that ever reach the Throne of God. Indeed, he is afraid they do not get there but spend themselves as wasted breath.

He has his occasional gleams of sunlight and when he feels the love of God in his soul he is as merry as the cricket on the hearth. There is not a man out of Heaven more joyous than he when his hope revives. But, oh, he is so tender about sin that when he finds himself growing a little cold, or in any measure backsliding, he begins to flog himself—at which I

am very glad, but he also begins somewhat to doubt his interest in his Lord, of which I am not glad, but pity him much and blame him, too, though with much sympathy for him. Now, I am not quite sure about this good man's name—it may be Little-Faith, or Feeble-Mind. Or is it Mr. Despondency I am thinking of? Or am I talking of Miss Much-Afraid? Or is it Mr. Ready-to-Halt? Well, it is someone of that numerous family.

This poor soul thinks, "Surely God will forget me!" No, no, dear Heart, He will not forget you! It is wonderful how God thinks of little things. Mungo Park picked up a little bit of moss in the desert and as he remarked how beautifully it was variegated, he said, "God is here: He is thinking of the moss and, therefore, He will think of me." Once upon a time a little plant grew right in the middle of the forest and the trees stretched for many a mile all around it and it said to itself, "The sunlight will never get at me. I have a little flower which I would gladly open, but it cannot come forth till the sunbeam cherishes me. Alas, it will never reach me! Look at the thick foliage! Look at the huge trunks of those towering oaks and mighty beeches—these will effectually hide the sun from my tiny form."

But in due season the sun looked through the trees like a king through the lattices and smiled on the little flower, for there never was a flower that God has not thought of and provided for! Say you not right well that "each blade of grass has its own drop of dew," and do you think that God will forget you, little as you are? He knows when swallows fly and when ants awake and gather their food and will He not think of you? Because you are little you must not suspect the love of your heavenly Father! Mother, which child is that which you never forget? If you ever went to bed at night and left one of the children out of doors, I know which one it was not. It was not the babe which lies helpless in your bosom. You never forget that. And you helpless ones, you timid trembling ones, if the Lord must forget any, it would be the strong, but certainly not you! As you breathe the prayer, "Remember me with the favor that You bear to Your people," the Lord answers you, "I do earnestly remember you still."

Observe next, that this poor trembling heart seems to be in great trouble for fear the Lord should pass it by, but at the same time feels that every good thing it can possibly receive must come from the Lord and must be brought to it by the Lord. Note the words—"O visit me with Your salvation," as if he had said—"Lord, I cannot come to You! I am too lame to come, I am too weak to come, but visit me. O Lord, I am like the wounded man between Jericho and Jerusalem— I am half dead, and cannot stir. Come to me, Lord, for I cannot move to You. Visit me, for only Your visits can preserve my spirit. I am so wounded and sorely broken and undone, that if You do not visit me with Your salvation even as if I never had been saved before, I must be lost."

Now, poor Trembler, let me whisper a half word into your ear and may God the Holy Spirit make it a comfort to you. You need not say, if you have a broken heart, "Lord, visit me." Do you not know that He dwells in you, for is it not written, "To this man will I look and with this man will I dwell, even with him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and that trembles at My Word"? Are you not the very person? I wish you could rejoice at God's Word, but as you cannot, I am glad you tremble at it, for you are the man that God has promised to dwell with. "Trembles at My Word"—lay hold on that and believe that the Lord looks towards you and dwells with you!

What a plaintive prayer this is! Carefully consider that this poor, weak, humble, trembling one longs to partake in the blessings which the Lord gives to His own people and in the joy which He has in store for them. This is the way in which he speaks, "I hear many Christians around me say that they know and are persuaded—O that I had a little of their certainty! I hear them speak so confidently, with such full assurance and I see the light leap out of their eyes when they talk about their sweet Lord and Master and all His love to them—oh, how I wish I could talk so! Poor me, I am only able to say, 'Lord, I believe: help You my unbelief.' I see them sitting at a loaded table and they seem to feast most abundantly, but as for me, I am glad it is written that the dogs eat the crumbs which fall from the Master's table, for if I get a crumb now and then, I feel so happy with it!

"But I wish I could sit and feast where others of God's children do. Oh that I could talk of rapt fellowship and close communion and joy and overflowing bliss! They tell me, some of them, that they sit down on the doorstep of Heaven and look within and see the golden streets and that, sometimes, they hear stray notes from the harps of the blessed ones in the far-off country. Oh, how I wish I had a sip of these joys! But, woe is me, I dwell in Mesech and sojourn in the tents of Kedar—the only music that I hear is the din of a sinful world—the viols of them that make merry in wantonness. I miss those precious things which the saints delight in."

Poor sorrowing Heart, let me say to you, and say in God's name—If you love your Lord, all things are yours. They are yours freely to enjoy even at this moment! The Lord denies you no Covenant blessing. Make bold to appropriate the sacred joys, for if you are the least child in the family, yet the heritage of God's children is the same for everyone! There is no choice thing that God will keep away from you. No, if there is one morsel more dainty than another it is reserved for such as you are! Be bold, then! If you are the Benjamin in the family, you shall have Benjamin's mess which is 10 times larger than any other! He will comfort you and bless you.

Only be of good cheer and when you are praying, "Favor me with the favor which You bear to Your people," let your faith hear Him say, "I am your portion." Rejoice in the Lord your God! Lift up the hands that hang down and confirm the feeble knees. Is not my text a sweet prayer for you? Pray it in faith and be at peace.

II. We will now look another way and say that our TEXT IS A SUITABLE PETITION FOR A POOR PENITENT BACKSLIDER. I know there are backsliders here, though, alas, I am not sure that they are penitent. Only the Lord can read their hearts. But if they are penitent, I can hardly conceive a more suitable petition for them than that which is before us. It is clear that this poor, pleading backslider feels that he has forgotten His God. Have you done that? You have been a Church member and you have gone sadly astray. Have you quite forgotten His Commandments? You thought you loved Him. You used to pray, at one time. You had some enjoyment in reading and in hearing the Word.

But now you find your pleasure somewhere else. You have left your first love and gone after many lovers. But, oh, if the Lord is gracious to you, you are lamenting your forgetfulness and though you have not remembered Him, the prayer leaps to your lips, "Lord, remember me!" Blessed be His name, He does not so easily forget us as we forget Him. If you are a truly penitent backslider, your feelings of repentance prove that God remembers you! It is He that sets you weeping and makes you sorrow for your sin! If you had been altogether forgotten of God, you would not have any desire to return to Him! But those inward pangs, those secret throes, those desires to be restored to the Lord—these prove that He remembers you with the favor which He has towards His people.

And, then, I think your next trouble will be this—you feel that you have lost your fellowship with Christ and you are right in so feeling, for, "How can two walk together except they are agreed?" How could Christ have fellowship with you in the ways of folly? Do you think Christ would come and talk comfortably to you while you are frivolous, or while you are unclean? How could that be? All joyful communion between your soul and God is broken and well may you pray, "O visit me with Your salvation. Come back to me, Lord. Come and dwell in me again—"

"Why should my foolish passions roam? Where can such sweetness be As I have tasted in Your love, As I have found in Thee?"

Come back, my Lord, and visit me with Your salvation." Is not this a prayer made on purpose for you?

And, next, you observe in the text that the poor backslider is longing to get a sight of the good things which for a long time have been hid from him. He cries, "That I may see the good of Your chosen." He has been out among the swine, but he could not fill his belly with the husks. He has been hungering and thirsting and now he remembers that in his Father's house there is bread enough and to spare. Backslider, do you remember that tonight? You know you are not happy and you begin to perceive that you never will be happy while you are living in the far country. If you had not been a child of God you might have made a

happy worldling after the sort of happiness that worldlings know, but you are spoiled for a worldling if you have ever known the love of God! And you have known that, or else you have been, indeed, a hypocrite! Do you not sigh to the Lord to give you these good things again?

Well, He will freely give them to you and He will not upbraid you. Come and try Him! He is ready to press you to His bosom and to forget and forgive the past and accept you in the Beloved. The poor backslider praying in the words of my text longs to taste once more the joy he used to feel and, therefore, he says, "That I may rejoice in the gladness of Your nation." And, again, he wants to be able to speak as he once could—"that I may glory with Your inheritance." Poor man, he is ashamed to speak to sinners. He hangs his head in company, for there are some that call him a turncoat. He does not like to have it known that he was once a Christian and, therefore, he comes stealing in to the assembly of the saints as if he hoped no one would know him.

There he is, but he feels half ashamed to be there—and yet he wishes that he were once more with the Christian brotherhood and could rejoice with them. My poor Friend, you used to be bold as a lion for Christ and now you turn tail

and fly! How can you be bold with all those inconsistencies? There was a time when you might have made a martyr, but now what a coward you are! And who wonders that you are so when they know that secret sin has sapped and undermined your profession and made you weak as water? I beg you to pray the prayer—"That I may glory with Your inheritance." You will never again make your boast in the Lord till you are restored, till you come back as you came at first with the old cry, "Father, I have sinned before You and am no more worthy to be called Your son." Come back even now, my Brother, and get another application of the blood of sprinkling. Look again to Jesus!

Ah, and I may here say, even if you have not backslidden, look again to Jesus! Those of us who have not fallen had better look to Him with our Brothers and Sisters who have fallen, for there is the same blessing needed by us all. We have all wandered to some extent. Come, let us look at those dear wounds anew! Can you not see Him? I think He hangs before me now! The crown of thorns is on His head and His eyes are full of languid pity and tearful grief. I see His face stained with spit and black and blue with cruel bruises! I see His hands—they are fountains of gore. I see His feet—they gush with rivulets of crimson blood. I look upon Him and I cry, "Was ever grief like Yours, O King of Sorrows?"

And as I look I remember that the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of all His people—and, looking—my sin departs from me because it was laid on Him! Looking, my heart yearns to love and then yearns to leap! Looking, I come back to where I stood before and now, once again, Christ is my All and I rejoice in Him! Have you gone through that process, Backslider? If you have done so while I have been speaking, let us praise God together!

III. The last use I have to make of my text will, I hope, be beneficial to many here present. It is this—THIS IS A

VERY SWEET PRAYER FOR A POOR SORROWING SEEKER. I beg all who desire conversion to remember this

prayer. They had better jot it down and carry it home with them, or, better still, breathe it to Heaven at once. Consider it well. To begin with, it is a sinner's prayer. "Remember me, O Lord!" A sinner's prayer, I say, for the dying thief rejoiced to use the words. He could not have reached down for a prayer-book and

said a collect, poor man, when he was dying—and there was no need he should. This is the best of prayers—"Lord, remember me when You come into Your Kingdom."

Trembling Sinner, what suited the dying thief may well suit you! Breathe it now, "Forget my sins, my Father, but remember me! Forget my delays; forget my rejecting of a Savior; forget the hardness of my heart, but, oh, remember me! Let everything pass away from Your mind and be blotted from Your memory but, dear Father, by the love of the Lord Jesus, remember me!" Sinner, do not go home without presenting that prayer to God! Note, again, it is the prayer of a lost one. "Visit me with Your salvation." Nobody wants salvation unless he is lost. People may talk about salvation who do not feel that they are lost, but they do not know anything about it and do not really desire it.

Lost Soul, where are you? Are you lost in a thousand ways—lost even to society? Well here is a fit prayer for you— "Visit me with Your salvation." Jesus Christ has not come to seek and to save those who do not need saving, but He has come on purpose to seek and to save those who are lost. You are the man He came to bless. Look to Him and you shall find that He is the Savior you require. "Visit me with Your salvation"—I cannot get this prayer into your hearts, but God can—and I am praying in my own soul that many of you in the galleries, or down below there, may now be crying, "Visit me with Your salvation."

Farther, remember that our text is the prayer of one who has a dim eye—"That I may see the good of Your chosen." We have told the seeker to look to Jesus, but he complains, "I try to look, but I cannot see." Beloved Seeker, I do not know that you are bid to see. You are bid to look and if you could not see when you looked, you would at least have obeyed the Gospel command. The looking, the looking would bring salvation to you! But for dim eyes Christ is the great cure. He can take away the cataract and remove the gutta serena. Pray tonight, "Lord, open my blind eyes that I may see the good of Your chosen." Then it is a prayer for a heavy heart. "That I may rejoice in the gladness of Your nation." The seeking soul moans out, "O that I had a little joy, or even a trembling hope! If it were ever so small a portion of light I should be glad." Pray for joy. The Lord waits to give it and if you believe in Jesus your joy shall be full.

And in the last place—not to detain you till you are weary—our text is the prayer of a spirit that is humble and laid in the very dust. It cries to God to enable it to glory with His inheritance because it is stripped of all other glory, emptied of its own boasts. Practically its plea is, "Lord, give me to boast in Your mercy and Your goodness, for I have nothing else to boast of." Now, beloved Hearer, this prayer I would most earnestly press upon you and I would press it upon you for these reasons.

Just think for a moment. Supposing you are living now without seeing the good of God's chosen, without being saved, what a wretched life it is to live! I cannot understand what men do without God! I cannot comprehend how they live. Do you have no cares? "Oh," you say, "we have anxieties in shoals." Well, where do you take them? I find I have troubles enough, but I have a God to take them to! What do you do with many troubles and no God? Do your children never distress your mind? How can you live with bad children and no God? Do you ever lose money in your business? Do you ever feel distracted? Do you ever say, "What shall I do? Which way shall I turn?"

I suppose you do. Then what do you do without a helper or a guide? Poor weak thing as I am, I run under the shelter of my Father's wings and I feel safe enough. But where do you go? Where do you fly? What is your comfort? I suppose you are something like the poor creatures condemned to death in old times to whom they gave a stupefying drink so that they might die without feeling the horror of death—surely you must be under a strong delusion that you can believe a lie, for if you were in your senses you could not do

without a God—no, not with your beautiful gardens and fine parks and wealth and riches and much less—many of you—with your poverty and hard labor!

Poor man without a God, how do you keep up your spirits? What comfort is there in your life? No prayer in the morning, no prayer at night—what days, what nights! Oh, men, I could as soon think of living without eating, or living without breathing, as living without prayer! Wretched naked spirits your souls must be without God to cover them! But if it is bad to live without Christ—and I am sure it is—what will it be to die without Him? What will it be to look into the future and find no light—no light and nobody that can bring you any? You have sent to the minister and he has spoken with you, but he cannot help you. You have had the prayers of your family who are sobbing at the thought of losing you, but you are looking out, alone, like one that gazes upon an angry sea in a cold winter's storm—and you can see nothing but the palpable dark.

Or, to change the metaphor, you are like a man on yonder wreck. Look, he is clinging to the mast! He hears the blast go whistling by him and soon it comes back howling around him, as if hungry for its prey. He can hear the seabirds screaming in the sky and they seem to prophesy his doom. The waves break over him, drenching him with their brine till he is ready to freeze as he hangs between Death's awful jaws. The lifeboat has been there and carried off all it can and it will never come back and, though he clings with desperation, he knows it is a forlorn hope. He will drift out to sea and his corpse will lie where pearls lie deep, in the caverns where many thousand skeletons have bleached these many years. His case is terrible to the last degree and yet it is a feeble picture of a soul leaving the body without an interest in Christ's salvation!

Before you get into that state, cry to God, "Remember me, O Lord, with the favor that You bear unto Your people. O visit me with Your salvation!" But the mist darkens and the tempest lowers in tenfold fury when we come to think what it must be to rise again from the tomb without Christ. When that last shrill clarion has sounded and every grave and cemetery shall have given up their sleepers. When the sea has yielded up the dead that are there and battlefields are swarming with the myriad slain that live again! When in the sky shall be seen the Great White Throne and upon it the Son of Man who bled for sinners, now come to judge and to condemn His adversaries—what will men then do if they have no personal religion, no interest in Christ, no portion in His salvation? Scripture tells us that they will ask the rocks to hide them and the hills to cover them! But they have no hearts of compassion—they will yield no shelter. There will be no refuge for the ungodly and nothing before them except the fiery indignation and wrath of God. "Turn! Turn! Why will you die?"

This is a common scene to many of you, this great gathering in the Tabernacle. I must confess I cannot look upon it without emotion, though I see it twice each Sunday. Here are all of you, and I, a lone man, standing here to talk to you in God's name. It is as much as my soul is worth if I am not earnest with you, but ah, I am not half as earnest as I ought to be. Yet hear me once more! I am a true prophet at this hour—when I warn you that you shall see this sight again if you reject the Savior. Across the flames of Hell you will see it and you will say to yourself, "The preacher warned us. He told us to cry to God for mercy. He pointed us to the Savior. He bade us pray and pray then and there."

You will remember my entreaties and then you will renew your agony with a wail which shall never end! You will cry, "God called, but I refused! He stretched out His hands, but I regarded Him not and now the day of Grace is past and the Christ whom I despised laughs at my calamity—there is no hope—no hope! I knocked too late at Mercy's door. My

lamp went out. I was a foolish virgin and I am shut out in outer darkness where there is weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth."

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Psalm 51. HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—51, 584, 556.

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