

“You Have a Mighty Engine in Your Hand—  
use it well, constantly and with fervent faith” —CHS  
Pastor Sam Richards  
April 11, 2021 — Eastertide

The Apostle John first wants us to know for certain that those who believe in the name of Jesus Christ **have eternal life**. This certainty has bearing on our present life which now unfolds under the canopy of eternal life—there is a difference between living for a span, a lifetime, and the realization that we are part of a kingdom that has no end and is the only imperishable realm—we are fixtures in that royal existence where we are present as loyal subjects of our eternal king. This foreverness, this lasting effect, moves us beyond lesser motives—we are not to be moved by making this world better nearly so much as we are to be moved by bringing glory to our God and King forever. We are not born again for now; we are born again for forever. And for glory which is more than recovery, more than adaptation or adjustment or wellness. Entirely whole is of that higher order . . . as in “eternally entirely perfected.”

Secondly, John longs for us to apply that certainty to **the confidence we have toward him . . . that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us**. This hearing exceeds listening, meaning, **what he hears** is as good as done. Therefore, as Charles Spurgeon declares, “we have a mighty engine in our hands.” Our prayers have binding force in heaven. This power is akin to the creative power of God. **God said, “Let there be light, and there was light.”** On the instant, without equivocation or delay—creation is that responsive to God. And it is responsive in a degree so vast, that we cannot necessarily see it—let alone time, or measure it. Let me ask, “How did you come to saving faith? Were you prayed for? Did some saint lovingly intercede for you? Are you indebted to anyone for this?” Have you considered how to pay it forward? Let me remind you of a tenderly affectionate moment in Scripture, where Jesus interceded for Simon Peter (Luke 22:31-34):

**31 “Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift all of you as wheat. 32 But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers.”**

**33 But he replied, “Lord, I am ready to go with you to prison and to death.” 34 Jesus answered, “I tell you, Peter, before the rooster crows today, you will deny three times that you know me.”**

Note: although I went to Luke 22 for **I have prayed for you**, what met me was this: **Satan has asked to sift all of you**. So the “sifting” that lay ahead was Peter’s threefold denial, and the wholesale forsaking of Jesus at the cross! And Jesus with enormous compassion intercedes—which prayer was answered when the apostles passed through the death and resurrection turmoil: doubt, despair

and unbelief to the other side. We do not know what would have happened if Jesus had not prayed, what we know is what did happen including his prayer!

So, we have eternal life, we have confidence that we are heard, and now thirdly, as motivation to intercede for others, we have, as John Cotton preached, this: “We shall in some measure be enabled, and made capable of bestowing the like blessing upon our brethren, and that by our prayers.” (Christ: the fountain of life, p. 385) Does he mean we, by prayer, may bestow on others, eternal life and confidence that our prayers are heard?! Yes. And, yes, I quoted, him as saying “in some measure” we would be “enabled and made capable of bestowing.” We have “a mighty engine in our hands” in our prayers. We can make an eternal difference in eternity and that is the thrilling implications of 1 John 5:13-17 for every believer within the hearing of my voice.

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**If any man should see his brother sin a sin which is not unto death, he shall ask, and he shall give him life.** (v.16) “As an instrument, God at his request shall give him life. God will make him, an instrument of conveying special favor to such a man.” (p. 385) Seriously? What an unsettlingly marvelous thing that is. We can ask forgiveness, brother to brother, and that petition will be heard . . . and answered. How loving! How empowering! Were those who crucified Jesus forgiven? Well, did anyone pray for their forgiveness? Yes, of course. The one being crucified prayed: **Father, forgive them, they know what they do.** They didn’t relent, nor repent. Jesus requested their forgiveness . . . can anyone doubt that they were forgiven? The epitome of cruelty, forgiven? “Former gymnast Rachael Denhollander used her (victim) statement Wednesday (January 24, 2018) against sex abuser Larry Nassar as a testimony and message of grace and forgiveness. (cited from “The Washington Post”) Was Larry forgiven? Did Rachael ask? **He shall ask, and he shall be given life.**

The Amish culture<sup>1</sup> closely follows the teachings of Jesus, who taught his followers to forgive one another, to place the needs of others before themselves, and to rest in the knowledge that God is still in control and can bring good out of any situation. Love and compassion toward others is to be life’s theme. Vengeance and revenge is to be left to God.

They chose to forgive Charlie Roberts, was he forgiven? We do not have to wait upon the repentances of any offender, *particularly* if that offender is a brother in Christ! Roman cruelty, sexual abuse, the murder of innocents?

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<sup>1</sup> (<https://lancasterpa.com/amish/amish-forgiveness/>) Following the schoolhouse incident on Oct. 2, 2006.

**Satan has asked to sift you all, but I have prayed for you. Forgiveness wins, and we can pray. I believe that a forgiving heart heals faster than an angry, hateful, vengeful one.**

Now 1 John 5:13-17 contains three parts: a.) a promise of obtaining life for our brethren; b.) an exception from this general promise (**of them that sin not unto death**) and c.) a qualification: there is sinning which is not unto death and that sinning we are empowered to intercede for.

Furthermore, three tributaries have joined together in my recent pastoral experience: John Cotton, Lecturing on the Great Doctrines of the Bible and Teaching Galatians at NEBC and they have converged on this very point. We are to pray for one another. We know that He hears us in whatever we ask. Listen, if we stare that in the face, we can hear Jesus' words in John 11:41-44 in fresh way. Here's the passage:

**41 So they removed the stone. And Jesus raised His eyes, and said, "Father, I thank You that You have heard Me. 42 But I knew that You always hear Me; nevertheless, because of the [crowd] people standing around I said it, so that they may believe that You sent Me." 43 And when He had said these things, He cried out with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" 44 Out came the man who had died, bound hand and foot with wrappings, and his face was wrapped around with a cloth. Jesus \*said to them, "Unbind him, and let him go."**

This is Jesus praying! **"Father, I thank you that you have heard me."** See, that squares with what we also know: **We know that he hears us in whatever we ask!** Then, as if there were any doubt, Jesus says out loud, **I knew that you always hear me.** This is true doctrine about prayer: his prayer, or our prayer—it makes no difference! God hears prayer, Jesus hears prayer. Prayer is the established mode of discourse between heaven and earth, between God and man, and since sin has been dealt with on the cross; all impedance to prayer has been removed! *God will hear us.* **But I said this on behalf of the crowd standing around**—this crowd is mixed, a few believers amongst the family of the bereaved, some professional mourners (most likely) and other Jews, some friendly and some hostile to Jesus. Jesus "fearers" were present, enemies and accusers, and, well, gossips. Probably no atheists. For the sake of that motley crew, Jesus prays out loud. He thanks God. He affirms that prayer is heard, ascribing reality to both prayer and the divine addressee! **That they may believe that you have sent me.**

There may well be an unspoken portion of prayer that passed between Jesus and his Father in heaven prior to **Father, I thank you.** It may have run something like this: "For the sake of your glory, Father, send the Holy Spirit to quicken the dead body of your servant Lazarus. Raise him from the dead and glorify

yourself through me *that these witnesses may see the connection between you, and prayer, and the power of life.* Demonstrate our unity of being and power. Defeat death before their very eyes right now.” **You have heard me.** The reason that I intersperse this piece about resurrection is in the text. Jesus, only the basis of his prayer, does not command life into the body of Lazarus. He commands the revived body of Lazarus: **Lazarus, come out.** Now the miracle behind the scenes, in the tomb, is seconded by another, Lazarus supernaturally appears. ***He was bound hand and foot yet the man who had died came out!***

This is unlike what would happen in Jesus’ case not many days hence. Jesus does not come forth **bound hand and foot**—he comes forth robed in majesty and light, full of power and glory. Jesus’ burial cloths and face covering were removed and set aside—the latter was even folded in place. So Jesus’ prayer was answered between **that they may know you sent me** (where I think the prayer ended) and **Lazarus, come out** (when Jesus’ answered prayer was manifested). ***Jesus prayed, Lazarus was raised.***

Jesus’ prayer demonstrated his entire dependency upon God the Father. We read elsewhere that he only does the work he sees his Father doing (John 5:19), he only speaks the words the Father is speaking (John 8:42; 12:49 and 14:10). We are likewise entirely dependent on God **for everything, every little breath, every heartbeat.** Charles Spurgeon has a marvelous sermon, #1091, “Prayer certified of Success” based on Luke 11:9-10 which text we read:

**And I say unto you, Ask, and it shall be given you; Seek and you shall find; Knock and it shall be opened unto you. For everyone who asks receives, and he that seeks finds; and to him that knocks it shall be opened.**

In that message, Spurgeon points out that our dependency on God is strategic: we were given little strength, compared to other animals because **the Lord was his strength. So long as he knew where to look for the source of his power (God), man remained the unresisted monarch of all around him. . . . The image of God in which he shone resplendent sustained his sovereignty. . . . By instinct, man turned to his God in Paradise, and now . . . there lingers in his memory shadows of what he was (. . . “but an uncrowned monarch now”).**

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**For everyone who asks receives.** Do Christians doubt as to the efficacy of prayer? Spurgeon delivers three mortal wounds to that doubt. 1. Consider the full weight of **I say unto you.** He is the Lord . . . and as he is **Lord**, we are bound to

believe Him! 2. The Lord presents us with a promise: **Ask**: receive; **seek**: find; and **knock**: it shall be opened to you. All three modes of prayer are efficacious. 3, Jesus Himself testifies that prayer is heard. As we discovered at the raising of Lazarus. But here He says specifically, that **everyone** is heard. No true prayer goes unheard . . . or unanswered.

Many years ago, perhaps as many as forty, Mary, a member of my first church, had a rough, profane and coarse a husband, Fred (names changed to protect the innocent) who was given to drink. Mary prayed for his salvation for years. Then it came about that Fred became ill. Fred began to attend to spiritual matters and turned to the Lord and was saved. Mary's prayers were answered and she was comforted. Together now, they faced the spiritual catastrophe that many ill-spent years had worked on their children. They were amazed at the change which had come over Fred—he was considerate whereas before he had been callous. The swearing ceased and the vices dropped off. Yes, medical protocols were supportive but they paled in comparison to Fred's spiritual transformation. Fred had no idea how to witness to his children. He read the Bible but certainly had little mastery compared to Mary. But he died beautifully, after blessing each child, surrounded by his family. And then the Lord did a wonderful thing: he made visible the transitions of Fred's spirit to heaven. As he breathed his last, a shaft of blinding light burst from his heart and tore its way through the ceiling. It was like a roaring rocket. And the force of it blew everyone back a step and Fred was gone. He was home at last and the reality of the divine was shed abroad. It was awesome . . . no one spoke for what seemed an age. And then with settled joy and peace, everyone went home, filled with wonder. And at the service, that marvelous experience buoyed us up—encouraged our faith in answered prayer.

Amen.