

**THE MIRACLES OF PRAYER. A  
SERMON PREACHED BEFORE THE  
UNIVERSITY, IN THE CATHEDRAL  
CHURCH OF CHRIST, IN OXFORD,  
ON SEPTUAGESIMA SUNDAY, 1866**

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The miracles of prayer. A sermon preached before the University, in the Cathedral Church of Christ, in Oxford, on Septuagesima Sunday, 1866 by E. B. Pusey

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**E. B. PUSEY**

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A

## SERMON

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BY THE REV.

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REGIUS PROFESSOR OF HEBREW, AND CANON OF CHRIST CHURCH.

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S. MATT. xxi. 22.

*“All things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive.”*

CAN man change the mind of God? Will God, on the prayer of man, change any part of that wondrous order which He has impressed upon His fair visible creation?

I seemed to myself to be but putting the questions, which perplex the minds (I must say) of those who do not pray; and see, I am at once plunged in the mysteries of man's free-will, and as to that course of mysterious tokens of God's presence which we call miracles. I did not mean it. Yet so are God's ways towards us interwoven together, even because He is our Father and our Creator and we are His children, that what is said of one effect of this our blessed relation necessarily has bearings upon others. Objectors meant only to touch upon one subject of prayer. Yet one could not formulise their objection, without being carried off into those other mysteries of man's free-will in the presence of God's absolute and eternal knowledge, and of God's wondrous doings in the material world, whether it comports with the wisdom

of God that He should change ought in His own creation. And so perhaps God would bring us back from hard and abstract questions to the gracious experience of every-day life, and would give us the solution of our difficulties, in what we may ourselves see, touch, handle, experience, know.

First then, in effect, God does through man's acts become other to him than He was before.

The voice of conscience echoes the voice of God's law, that we sinners, while we remain sinners, are the objects of God's displeasure. Conscience cries aloud, enforces it; she reiterates it, when silenced; she awakens in agony, when she has been stupefied; and, even when deadened and buried under accumulated sin, she lives anew by a spiritual resurrection. When our Lord's voice of power, "Lazarus come forth," has penetrated the dead soul, and with penitence for its own ingratitude, has infused love for its Redeemer, and He, by Himself or by His minister, has said, "Son, be of good cheer, thy sins be forgiven thee," the soul knows and feels that its relation to God and God's relation to it are changed.

And for our second question, observe that this change itself cannot be without prayer. The first voice is of Jesus to the soul, "Come unto Me, thou weary and heavy laden, and I will give thee rest;" the second is of the soul to Jesus, "Lord, save me; I perish." Still the relation of the soul to God is changed. Had it perished in its sins it must have been shut out for ever from the presence of God, hating God and the object of His malediction; "Depart from Me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire." Now, God is its Friend, its Counsellor, its Illuminer, its



Engracer, its Indweller. Plainly the fact that Jesus did first speak to the soul, shews that the soul, although at enmity with God, a desolator of His creation, a denier (perhaps in theory too, but in practice certainly) of Himself, too proud or too enslaved to endure the "perfect freedom" of His ennobling service, a destroyer,—through passions of the flesh, which bowed it in the mire, or by propagating in its pride lessons of rebellion against Himself—a murderer of souls for whom Christ died—that soul must still have been in some sense an object of God's love and care. For, had it finally rejected God and been rejected by God, it could not have received that converting grace, which at last overwhelmed its resistance and brought the Prodigal son back to the outstretched Arms of his Redeemer. Still the returned soul knows, that not only is its whole self changed towards God, but that the relations and actions of God towards it are also changed. That unknown calm which spreads over the soul, that inward sweetness of Divine consolations, what betoken they, but that his Father has beheld him and had compassion and fallen on his neck and kissed him? He has received the kiss of peace. Before, God, except in merciful dispensations of His displeasure or soon-rejected solicitations of His grace, or His common benefits towards His creation, which might from without bear witness to Himself, was, as if there were no God. Now, all the treasures of His love, His grace, are open to it. The soul is united to its indwelling God.

And this change has often been wrought by Jesus through the prayers of others. Such is the love of God towards us, such the dignity which He bestows

upon us, to be co-operators with Himself, that man's fervent cry for others who never pray for themselves, inspired by Himself, upheld by His own grace of "hope against hope," obtains that last first grace which won the hitherto obdurate rebel to Himself.

God's word guarantees this, when it bids us pray "for all men," because God "a will have all men to be saved." God's word is justified in act by the known instances of those whose souls He has saved through prayers which He Himself inspired. Witness he, the great teacher of the Church till now, of whom, though unknown in the flesh and known only through the eminence of his rebellion, it was said; "b it is not possible that the son of those tears should perish;" who himself, when converted, owned himself to be the fruit of those nine years' unbroken, unfaltering prayers of his mother St. Monnica c, who lived for his conversion and, when this object of her being was accomplished, yielded up her own soul to God d.

Which are greatest, the miracles of nature or the miracles of grace? which is the greatest interference (to use man's word), to change passive unresisting nature, or man's strong, energetic, resisting will, which God Himself so respects, that He will not force the will, which He has endowed with freedom, that it might have the bliss, freely to choose Himself? Which is the mightiest noblest work, to condense, if so be, the operations of nature, and change the water into wine, without the intervening process of its passing through the vine, or to change the wolf into

a 1 Tim. ii. 1-4.

b St. Aug. Confess. iii. end.

c Conf. ix. 8. and other places quoted ib. p. 169. n. n. Oxf. Tr.

d Ib. 10, 11. pp. 175, 6.

the lamb, the blasphemer and constringer to blaspheme into the Apostle, the persecutor of Jesus in His disciples, into him to whom to live was Christ and to be crucified with Christ, who became the servant of all, that he might win the more to Christ and to life? or again to change the slave of degrading passion, its fires yet unspent, into the saint; the spirit, entangled in the wild God-degrading fanaticism of the Manichees into the clear God-enlightened teacher and oracle of the Church, now for 1400 years?

Or again, to take the greatest miracle in the province of nature, which is greatest,—to recall into the body the departed soul, to re-animate it again for some few years and then again (except in the case of our Lord) to depart from it until the Resurrection at the Great Day, or to transform the soul, dead in its sins, into the life of God, to gain for it a life which shall never die, a brightness and brilliancy of Divine life which shall never fade, an union with God which the dissolution of the body from the soul shall not dissolve nor interrupt, but which shall live on for ever, to be perfected in the beatific vision of Himself and the never-ending ever-unfolding communication of Himself throughout eternity?

And therefore it probably was, that our Lord promised to His Apostles, “<sup>e</sup>He that believeth on Me, the works that I do shall he do also, and greater works than these shall he do, because I go unto My Father.” He reserved to Himself after His Atoning Death a greater work than He accomplished in life; not the imperfect impression upon a multitude among the Jews who were to the end like “reeds shaken by the

\* S. John xiv. 12.