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THE STEWARDSHIP OF PRAYER
By Joseph Grant Morrison

"Men ought always to pray, and not to faint." -- Luke 18:1

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01 -- INTRODUCTION

Let us refresh the memory of the reader by recalling the meaning of stewardship. That is, it means that we owe something to somebody. Stewards are not working directly for themselves or investing their own capital; they are expected to invest the capital intrusted to them by someone else, faithfully to guard the interests of the one who chose them as stewards, and then give an account to him, of their stewardship.

Who is it, we ask, who has endowed us with the "capital" of prayer? What does it mean to invest this prayer ability? What gains does the One who has placed this remarkable capital of prayer at our disposal, promise, to those who faithfully become stewards of its power? Are we not, then, as followers of the Lord Jesus Christ, under obligation to Him to invest more faithfully, in connection with this marvelous privilege of prayer? That is, we owe it to God to pray.

In other words are we not stewards of the astonishing dynamic of prayer, which He has committed to our charge? Are we prepared, then, to give an account to Him of the way we have invested in this capital? In view of the returns that He has promised to the one who invests in prayer, is there not a danger that our accountancy to Him of our stewardship of it, will be a humiliating confession instead of a triumphant report?

Instead of being able to say, like the steward of the talents in the parable, "Thou deliveredst unto me five talents of prayer, behold, I have gained for thee five talents more," shall we not be compelled shamefacedly to say, "Behold, I was given only one small talent of prayer, and feeling that it was of little account, I buried it in a napkin. Here it is, just as thou gavest it me."

What, then, will be the Judge's answer, and sentence?

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02 -- BINDING AND LOOSING

Let us examine into the capital that has been committed to us. How much prayer "dynamite" has God made us stewards of? Just what does He desire that we shall undertake in connection with the investment of it?

Let us read in Matthew 18, where the Master is talking to His budding church. At the fifteenth verse, He tells His followers how to regain the confidence and fellowship of an offended brother in the Kingdom. He gives definite instructions about it, and then solemnly warns the offended one what his fate will be, if he doesn't accept the overtures of his brethren. Then He makes this astonishing statement:

"Verily I say unto you, whatsoever ye shall bind on earth, shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth, shall be loosed in heaven." -- Matt. 18:18

We do not presume to attempt a complete exposition of this amazing statement. We are not sure that anyone can tell us all that it means. We desire only to call attention to some of its implications. Our Lord here implies that:

1. His church here on earth has an amazing ability to "bind" something, and that when it does, He agrees to back it up by "binding" the same thing in heaven.

2. That He has given it the power to "loose" some things here on earth, and that when it does, He will co-operate with it by "loosing" them in heaven.

Whatever the full significance may be that is wrapped up in this strange statement, there is a plain implication that God's people here on earth, through the power of prayer may "bind" or "loose" certain things, and that Jesus our Master has agreed that when they do, He will accept that "binding," or "loosing," and put it into effect.

Imagine for a moment that God's people should agree to "bind" heaven to a visitation upon a certain church, or community, or family, of a blessed soul saving revival? Imagine that His saints should set about "loosing" certain individuals from their sins, their prejudices, their indifferences, their opposition to holy things, by prayer. Is he not obligated to agree to that, and put it into effect?

And what shall happen if His people indifferently fail to "bind" or "loose" spiritual forces in this world, shall we not face the awful delinquency at the last day? In other words, is there not committed to us a stewardship of prayer? And are we laboring so assiduously at it, as to be able to give our account some day to Him, with joy and not with grief?

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03 -- WHEN TWO AGREE

But the next verse, viz., the 19th, throws additional light on this keen responsibility. It states: "Again, I say unto you, that if two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven." -- Matt. 18:19

Here our Lord's statement is definite, and with few qualifications, almost unlimited. He doesn't put any limit on the objectives sought, but says "touching anything that they shall ask." We may presume that the limitations are to be found in the believers themselves. As devout, Spirit-filled followers of the Lord Jesus Christ, their own spiritual sense, guided by the Holy Ghost, would not allow them to ask for foolish, frivolous, questionable things. As keen lovers of God and His Kingdom interests on earth, they would not desire to obtain anything that He did not desire them to have. Consequently their agreement would only be in connection with what was in the divine will.

But within that will, is there not a great realm covered by that marvelous promise, that as faithful stewards of Christ, we are bound to make an effort to realize? What about a richer, keener, more spiritually illuminated experience of holy things for yourself? Is that not in the will of God? Is it not, then guaranteed if you can only find someone who will "agree" with you to press your case in that respect? Are you not a steward of the dynamite of the Holy Ghost upon your own heart and life? And how will you feel when you are compelled to give an account some day that you were content to live on infrequent touches of the Holy Ghost, instead of being accorded the fullness, and the overflow, until "there was not room enough to receive it"?

How about the salvation of the members of your own family? Surely this is in the divine will. If you would "agree" with some other faithful soul to present that matter to the throne, with intercessory petition, does He not here pledge that He will sometime, somewhere bring it about?

What about a gracious and burning visitation of the Holy Ghost upon your own local church, your Sunday school class, the group of young people in your home congregation, or upon the missionaries in foreign lands, and the work they do there? The great God is not only willing, but eagerly anxious that all these shall be accomplished. Indeed, is not the failure to get these done, due almost wholly to the fact that there are few who will with passionate prayer, and intercessory petition, fulfill the conditions of the "agreement" mentioned above, and therefore the visitation is not brought about.

And are not God's people stewards of every bit of holy dynamite that they are able to explode in connection with spiritual achievement? What shall be the consequence then, if we indolently fail to qualify under the terms of this startling statement of our Lord, and our loved ones perish in the pit, our own souls remain lean and comparatively powerless, our church is unvisited by the refreshings from the presence of the Lord, and the path to perdition is unblocked with intense pleadings which are guaranteed by this statement of Jesus to release the pent up powers of our heavenly Father? Is there not committed to us, here, a stewardship of prayer? Will there not come a time when we shall be asked in connection therewith, "give account of thy stewardship"?

But the argument does not rest with two solitary verses of Scripture, and these considered by some to be of somewhat obscure meaning. Listen to these words of our Lord: "And all things, whatsoever, ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive." -- Matt. 21:22

The condition added here, to that which was involved in the "agree" of the other passage, is that of faith. "Believing," He declares. Probably this was implied in the other one, but here, at any rate, it is clearly stated. We must have faith; faith that God is; that He has spoken to humanity through His Word and through His Son; that His Word is inviolate; that petitions will be answered unless we fail to qualify; that He desires and intends to save everyone whom He can. Faith -- a faith that is more than a mere attitude of confidence, but is a glorious, realistic medium through which He can operate and release His power to accomplish the thing prayed for.

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04 -- RESULTS IF WE QUALIFY

But after every allowance has been made for the implications, the demands, the qualifications of faith -- when all these, in theory, at least, have been complied with, see what is promised here: "All things whatsoever . . . ye shall receive!"

If that is not holy dynamite laid at the feet of His believing people, we would like to have someone show us some. In effect the Master says: "If you have absolute faith in Me, and will ask, you may have anything that that faith will claim."

There, steward, is your capital. There are your "talents," bestowed by your Lord; intrusted to you by your King, while He is absent on a long journey, but due to return almost any time now. What are you doing with them? How much have you traded with them? What gain can you show, when the cry is made, "Behold the Bridegroom cometh"? What sort of a steward are you, of this manifold, amazing, marvelous dynamic of prayer? Are you ready to give an account?

Think of the days that you have been almost prayerless. Think of the situations that you have confronted and sunk down before them in despair. Think of the battles you might have won for your Lord, and the defeats that you actually sustained because you did not pray, or if you did, you prayed with little or no faith. What will you tell the King, when He asks you: "How did you pray down there when my Kingdom was beaten about by false religions, by humanism, and communism, and prejudice, and unbelief, and gross sin? Then what answer will you give? Come, come, believer in Jesus, and His shed blood, give account of thy stewardship!

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05 -- IN JOHN'S GOSPEL

Lest some reader may think that we are limiting ourselves, in the discussion of this matter, to the writings of St. Matthew, let us turn to a verse in John's gospel: "And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If ye shall ask anything in my name, I will do it." -- John 14:13-14

Our Lord uttered this astonishing statement immediately following His declaration that followers were to go out and do greater works than He had done. Then, as though they might begin, somewhat in despair, to question how they were to do this, He delivered this amazing pronouncement.

We have noticed the conditions set forth in the other verses we have considered, first, "where two shall agree"; second, "all things, . . . that ye shall ask in prayer, believing." Now, we have another condition stated here; or the same conditions maybe, set forth in different terms: "whatsoever ye shall ask in my Name."

We are sure that this does not mean that if we attach the name of Jesus to a petition, it necessarily will be answered. We believe that it is a beautiful custom, among holiness people, to do this, that is, to close each prayer "in Jesus' name," or "for Christ's sake," but we feel certain that it means infinitely more than that. It means what the statement "agree," meant in the first verse considered -- an agreement that is a veritable covenant with heaven, and signifies that one has been cleansed, and filled and inspired in prayer by the Holy Ghost -- an agreement that manifests love toward all fellow Christians, and compassion toward all unsaved humanity. To ask "in my Name," is also equivalent to the "believing" in the second Scripture brought to our attention. A faith that rests in absolute contentment on the Word, the grace -- the contact which that soul has had with God. So, "in His name," means that we "agree," and "believe," and plead His Name, His Nature, His Character, His Grace, His Power. And when this is done with humble confidence He states that "He will do it."

Here again, He places a wonderful power in the hands of His people. Again He puts us under obligation to exercise that petition that can be offered "in His Name." Again we become stewards of the power that Name will release. Again, we face the possibility of rendering an account at the Judgment Day with humiliation and regret, in the event we fail in our stewardship.

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06 -- ABIDING AND RECEIVING

Let us examine one more Scripture. This one, also, will be from John's gospel, the fifteenth chapter and seventh verse. Note well what it says:

"If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you."

Here are some conditions stated in a slightly different way. "Abiding in him"; this is the first, and means, practically the same as the "agree," and the "believe," mentioned in Matthew. And the "in His Name," mentioned in John. All of them signify a close, keen, vital and constant relation to Jesus our Lord. The second one is not unlike it, viz., "and my words abide in you." This is surely a faith that makes the teachings of Jesus as intimate and vital as the heart that beats in one's breast, and the blood that flows in one's veins.

However, after the Christian has qualified in this realistic manner, look at the commission, look at the dynamic that is laid at his feet: "ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you." Are there not possibilities here undreamed? Are there not revivals, and awakenings, personal anointings and victories, for which the church has long sought, eagerly desired, but seldom seen?

With such power laid at our feet, with such a commission extended to us, with such releasements within our grasp, do we not become stewards of prayer, in a manner never dreamed of before? Does not the amazing spiritual power of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost, exercised in answering intercessory prayer, belong to the one who abides in Christ, and in whom His words abide?

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07 -- WHO IS TO BLAME?

Is not one of the reasons why so few of God's people realize much from these amazing authorizations, because they do not make much of an effort to do so? Would not the sum total of spiritual achievements be marvelously increased if any considerable number of His disciples actually betook themselves devotedly to the task of earnest, devout intercession? Would not the power of these inspired pronouncements of our Lord operate and be made effectual, if His followers really made a determined effort?

Who then is to blame that so little is accomplished in the extension of the Kingdom? Are not we who profess His experiences and carry His name? And to whom will He turn with an inquiry concerning our stewardship of these holy matters, when the last great day shall set, but to us? And what shall we say when we are asked to give an account of our stewardship of prayer? How much have we invested in the marvelous capital that He has committed to our trust?

How Much Owest Thou Unto My Lord? Do we not, then, as stewards of prayer owe it to God, to attempt oftener to offer the prayer of faith for our own increase in spiritual attainments? For an awakening among our own church folks, and the other followers of Christ? Do we not owe it to ourselves to pray much more than we do? Do we not owe it to our families, constantly to pour out a stream of intercession? Do we not owe it to our own church, to hold it up in hourly breathings to God? Do we not owe it to our home town, our state, our nation, and this age to do our best to release God upon the present restless, godless, sinful, communistic period in which we live?

Is not God looking for a channel of prayer over which He can operate? Is He not anxious for a "contact" people, who will believe Him, be like Him, feed upon His Word, live in Him, plead daily and hourly in His Name, so that He can do what otherwise He could not do? If this be true, then are we not, in a most desperate and meaningful way, the stewards of prayer? And shall we not be compelled some day to give an account of that stewardship?

Who will agree then to begin prayer as soon as you struggle back to consciousness after the sleep of the night? Who will continue to send up petitions of prayer while you are clothing yourself for the day? Who will breathe into the ear of the Almighty a short prayer while you wash, or bathe? Who will spend the few minutes before breakfast with a portion of it devoted to petition? Who will from time to time during the day, send up prayers, supplications, petitions, and intercessions so that the day may become one of more intimate communion and acquaintance with God?

Who will take the missionary cause of the church upon his heart and travel around the world with it at least once every day? Can we not, if enough of us qualify, precipitate a world wide awakening to God, and thus "serve our present age, our calling to fulfill?"

"Arm me with jealous care,
As in Thy sight to live,
And, O Thy servant, Lord, prepare
A strict account to give."

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THE END