

FAVORITE TEXTS OF THE BIBLE

by
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Ephesians 2:8, 9: SAVED BY GRACE

The Bible is the Word of God and as such is precious to the child of God. It is God's own Word, as it testifies, "*All scripture is given by inspiration of God*" II Timothy 3:16. Therefore, we accept the written Word of God as much as we would if we heard God speak it with His own voice. The word "inspiration" means "God-breathed." All scripture is breathed of God.

We can read with profit any part of the Bible. Whether it is law, history, poetry, prophecy, biography or personal letters, it is the Word of God. That is why the Bible says of itself, "*All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works*" II Timothy 3:16, 17. But though all the Bible is profitable, some parts seem to speak to us more meaningfully than other parts.

Each of us has certain passages of Scripture which are special to us. I want to share with you five passages which are "favorite texts" to me, and we will discuss them in our next five

visits together.

One of my very favorite texts of the Bible is Ephesians 2:8-10, which reads: *“For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.”* It is a precious message, isn't it? Let us examine that text carefully and see what God speaks to us through it. There are five great truths in the text to which I call your attention.

Saved by grace

Salvation is by grace: *“For by grace are ye saved through faith”* verse 8. We are a little helpless when we begin to try to define grace. One says it is “undeserved favor.” Another suggests it means God doing for us good when we deserved ill, blessing when we deserved condemning. Another, using the spelling of the word to form an acrostic, suggests that grace is *“God’s Riches At Christ’s Expense.”* But each definition, as good as it is, falls short.

Let us say that grace is the term used to describe the kindly attitude of loving-kindness and good will which God extended to us freely and spontaneously when He planned and offered salvation to sinners. It is the act of God by which He moved to rescue helpless and guilty sinners so as to make them His children.

To say that salvation is by grace indicates that it is not by works. To say it is of God is to say that it is not of man. *“For by grace are ye saved.”*

Saved through faith

Salvation is through faith: *“For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God”* verse 8. What is faith? The New English Bible translates Hebrews 11:1 in these words: *“And what is faith? Faith gives substance to our hopes and makes us certain of realities we do not see.”* Faith is certainty concerning unseen realities.

There are three elements to faith, as set forth in Bible teaching. It involves a firm conviction concerning God, a personal surrender to Him and a life style which is consistent by such surrender. *“By grace are ye saved through faith.”*

Take care, however. Do not think of faith as a deed of merit by which one deserves to receive the forgiveness of God. Not at all. Faith is the extending of an empty hand to receive the benefits of God's grace. It is man's expression of willingness to receive what God gives freely. There is always the element of trust and surrender in Christian faith. He who truly believes God belongs to God because he yields to Him in confident trust. Salvation is surrender to God, who performs the miracle of salvation by grace and makes the sinner a saint.

Saved by God

Salvation is God's deed: *“It is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast”* verses 8, 9. The Bible is careful to teach that salvation is God's gift, not man's accomplishment. When the term “gift” is used regarding salvation, the idea of “free gift” is always prominent. The idea is that God gives salvation because He may and not because He must.

The Bible says, *“It is the gift of God.”* What is the gift of God? Is it salvation, grace or faith which is the antecedent of the pronoun it? We could say it is either or all of the three. But since the subject under consideration is salvation, that must be the one. *“For by grace are ye*

saved through faith: and that not of yourselves: [your salvation] is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast” verses 8, 9.

The point to be emphasized just here, however, is that salvation is God’s deed. Man neither deserves it nor performs it. *“Salvation is of the Lord”* Jonah 2:9.

Saved without works

Salvation is a free gift: *“It is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast”* verses 8, 9. I stress this truth because there is such widespread disbelief of it in the religious world. It humbles man to realize he is helpless in his sin. He wants to do something to remedy his plight. He desires to help God work out his salvation. But God does not work that way.

Salvation is either all of grace or it is all of works, according to Romans 11:6, which reads, *“And if by grace, then it is no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then it is no more grace: otherwise work is no more work.”* There can be no mixture. Do you want your salvation to depend on what you can do or on what God can do—His grace or your works?

“The gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord” Romans 6:23. *“To him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness”* Romans 4:5.

Saved for service

Salvation is for service: *“We are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them”*(verse 10). Yes, each of us is saved to serve.

Good works do not produce salvation, but they are produced by salvation. One does not serve God in order to be saved, but serves God because he is saved. God has decreed that each one who trusted Jesus Christ should serve Him.

“It was nothing you could or did achieve—it was God’s free gift of grace which saved you—through your trusting him. That did not come from yourselves, but was a gift from God. It has not been earned through works which any man can do, lest any man should boast of what he has done. For we are God’s own handiwork (He has made us what we are), creating us through our union with Jesus Christ for the purpose of our doing good deeds; that was the way of life God predestined us to walk even before we were saved.”

Meditate on the meaning of that blessed revelation in Ephesians 2:8-10. Memorize the passage. Recite it over and again to yourself. And you will stand in wonder over the grace of our God who has saved you and joined us to Jesus Christ.

Romans 5:1,2: BLESSINGS OF FAITH

One of my favorite passages of scripture is Romans 5:1, 2. It speaks of the blessings which come from God to man upon the exercise of Christian faith. Here is its reading:

“Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: by whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.”

I see five blessings which are mentioned as coming upon the exercise of personal faith in God through Jesus Christ. The blessings are: justification, peace, access, standing and joy. Let

us examine them one by one and we will worship at the feet of Jesus who has brought them to us in grace.

Justification

Justification comes by faith. *“Therefore being justified by faith . . .”* verse

1. Justification is a blessed Bible doctrine. To justify means to declare one to be righteous, to acquit one of guilt, to restore relationships which have been broken as a consequence of sin, as if the sin had never occurred.

The grammatical form is such as to indicate a once-for-all act when God justifies us by faith. The act of justifying need never be repeated; it is always valid.

Justification is not a change in feeling but a change in relationship. It is objective, something done for us by God. Forgiveness is the settling of the issue of sins past; justification is the recognition of relationship present. God’s justification in Christ covers the past and guarantees the future.

To be justified means to be “just-as-if-I’d” never sinned. God restores the justified one to the full right of access and blessing of acceptance before Him. And we are justified on the basis of personal faith in Jesus Christ.

Peace

Peace with God comes by faith. *“Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ”* verse 1.

What is that “*peace with God*” of which the Bible speaks? It is more than ease of conscience or ceasing of hostility. The peace with God gives is the state of positive blessedness. It is the sum total of the blessednesses and benefits which justification brings.

Peace does not mean that we cease to be hostile to God but that the wrath of God is no longer exhibited toward sin in us. Romans 1:18 warns, *“The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness.”* But when the sin is gone, the wrath is gone. And there is no sin in one who is justified.

“When we are justified through faith, we have peace. Peace of conscience in the mercy of God; peace of heart in the love of God”—W.H. Griffith Thomas.

This is the peace of which Jesus spoke, saying *“Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you; not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.”* John 14:27.

The peace of God floods the heart because peace with God has been established through forgiveness of sin by grace through faith.

Access

Access to God comes by faith. Romans 5:2 speaks of Jesus as the One *“by whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.”*

“Access” is a beautiful word. It suggests the idea of an entrance, but, more than that, it carries the element of introduction to the personal presence of another. There is even a further element of freedom to enter and welcome upon entrance. The term is used three times in the New Testament (Romans 5:2; Ephesians 2:18; 3:12), each time involving our entrance into God’s presence and our right of entrance through Jesus Christ.

How would you like the right to approach into the very presence of God? You have it as a Christian. That is what access means. Jesus presents us before God, and we are received there with welcome because of grace. That is what makes the throne of God “*the throne of grace*” where “*we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need*” Hebrews 4:16.

We have more than a blessed audience with God. We have the right to go once and again before Him as His dear children and as believer priests. When Jesus died on the cross, the veil of the temple was torn in two Matthew 27:51, indicating the way of access to the Father was opened for us all through Christ.

Standing

Standing in grace is by faith. “*We have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand . . .*” verse 2.

What a blessed privilege is involved in that term “stand.” It is a verb tense called “the perfect tense” in Greek grammar. It indicates that “we have standing, we have immovable and unshakable establishment, we permanently stand in eternal safety. We have immovable and permanent establishment in the grace into which Jesus led us for eternal access. “We have permanent access’ and ‘we have permanent standing’ in the eternal grace of God. Words for assurance are exhausted, and inspiration gives increased assurance”—J.P. McBeth.

It is our right to be in the realm of grace. We “stand” there. We have been permanently established there of God. And it is the result of our exercising faith in God who moved in grace toward us in the blessing of salvation.

Joy

Joy comes by faith. “*We stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God*” verse 2. The word “rejoice” means to give a shout of triumph. It is the shout of victory. It is the shout of assurance. It is a shout only a Christian can give.

“We are victoriously saved, and we give a shout of triumph in our hope of the glory of God. We shout because we have triumphed for eternity in assurance, in peace, in fellowship, in access to the throne of grace, in immovable establishment in grace, triumph in hope, and in the glory of God. The present triumph in these, together with the absolute assurance of their being consummated in heaven, is enough to produce rejoicing, glorying and shouting”—J.P. McBeth.

We rejoice because of our assurance that glory is ahead. It would be difficult to refrain from shouting in view of such blessings God has provided in grace.

Look at the blessings of faith: Justification before God comes by faith. Peace with God comes by faith. Access to God comes by faith. Standing before God comes by faith. Rejoicing in God comes by faith. Faith has secured for us every spiritual blessing provided for us in Jesus Christ.

If you lack justification or peace or access or standing or joy, it is because you are not exercising faith. I urge you to settle the issue right now.

Turn all confidence from every person and thing and set it upon God alone. On the basis of what He has done for you in Jesus Christ surrender your whole self to Him. Give Him all your sins, your successes, your whole self. Invite him to come into your life as Lord. And He will! Today can be the beginning of a new life for you if you receive Him in faith.

Matthew 1:28-30: FINDING REST IN JESUS

Matthew 11:28-30 has spoken peace and assurance to the hearts of so many people that it has become a favorite text for many. A review of some of our "Favorite Texts of the Bible" must include this passage of love and invitation. Jesus said, "*Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light*" Matthew 11:28-30. If you are bearing a burden today, Jesus has a word for you. If you long for peace in your heart, Jesus has a word for you. If you seek rest from the pressures of life, Jesus has a word for you. "*Come unto me,*" Jesus says, "*and I will give you rest . . . and ye shall find rest for your souls.*" The problem that men do "*labor and are heavy laden.*" That word "labor" is suitable to use to describe the results of men's efforts apart from God. The word means "toil resulting in weariness; trouble; laborious effort." When used as a verb, it means "to grow weary." To be "laden" means to be heaped up and overwhelmed. Men have that problem today as well as then. The text recognizes a problem. The problem is that men do "*labor and are heavy laden.*" That particular labor to which Jesus refers, and the particular load which men tried to bear, was religious. He elsewhere condemns the religious leaders of the day because "*they bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers*" Matthew 23:4. The idea is that the obligations of religion are a blessing if they bring a person to God in the proper way. But rituals do not bring a person to God. They only increase a seeker's burden.

But the "burden" of which Jesus speaks can be anything which weighs upon the human spirit. And He promises that there is a remedy for all burdens and a lifting of each one which heavily loads a person. You have experienced that, just as I have. But there is a moving of the burden and a lifting of the load.

The invitation

The text issues an invitation. "*Come unto me,*" Jesus invites. What an invitation that is! I heard a man speak who had received an invitation to attend a special meeting called by the President of the United States of America. He was amazed that he would be given an invitation. He was excited about the prospect. He could hardly speak of anything else. How much more wonderful is the invitation which God Himself extends to people such as you and I. And Jesus invites us!

God calls, but man must come. The Bible doctrine of the sovereignty of God does not remove the responsibility of man to respond to the call of God. Man has a will and must answer, "Here am I," when God extends the invitation of grace. The Bible announces that "whosoever will" may come. Do not wait for one to overcome your resistance and bring you to Him in spite of yourself. Let the awareness of need and the desire for rest arouse in you immediate response to the call of God.

"Come unto me," Jesus said, "and I will give you rest."

The blessing

The text promises a blessing. What is the great need of the person who is weary from

labor and burdened down with a heavy load? He needs to cease his labors and be relieved of the weight of his load. Only then will he enjoy rest. And that is just what Jesus promises. *“Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”*

The “rest” which is promised means “to cause or permit one to cease from any movement or labor in order to recover and collect one’s strength.” That invitation might be applied in two ways.

Jesus causes the believer to cease from his own efforts to deal with sin in his life, taking it upon Himself at Calvary, and allows the believer to know release and rest when the burden of sin-guilt is removed. That is called forgiveness.

Jesus causes the believer to cease from self-effort of the flesh to produce fruit for God in spiritual service. The Holy Spirit, who lives within the human spirit of every Christian, lives within and produces the fruit of the Spirit. Service no longer becomes a man’s duty; it is his privilege and joy instead.

Jesus’ invitation is extended to you now. You can come to Him as a repenting and trusting sinner to receive the peace of forgiveness. Or, you can come to Him as a burdened saint and receive the peace of sanctification. You can come to Him!

That two-fold coming is indicated by the two references to rest in the text. First, Jesus said, *“I will give you rest.”* Then, Jesus said, *“Ye shall find rest.”* Jesus gives the rest of salvation, and the Christian enters into the rest of sanctification. Jesus gives rest from guilt, and the Christian enters the rest of service. The second is but an extension of the first. And what rest it is!

The explanation

The text contains an explanation. *“My yoke is easy, and my burden is light”* verse 30. Understand that there is a “yoke” to be borne and a “burden” to carry even in the service of the Lord Jesus.

The term “yoke” was used by Jewish teachers in New Testament days to refer to submission to the authority of a teacher. To take one’s yoke upon you meant to yield to the instruction and follow the principles of a religious teacher. A “burden” meant a thing to be borne.

Recognize that being a Christian does not mean there is no duty or demand to follow and serve the Christ. Quite the contrary, there is a yoke to be worn and a burden to be borne. It is the obligation of obedience and service to Christ.

What makes serving Christ any better than any other religious system, if He has a yoke and a burden? He explains, *“My yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”* The term “easy” which is used in describing His yoke, means “fit for use, mild pleasant (in contrast to what is hard, harsh, sharp, bitter).” It is a good word used to describe the nature of God where it is translated “kind, gracious, good.” There is no pain nor weariness in bearing the yoke.

The “burden” to which Jesus refers is said to be “light.” That is, it is easy to bear. What a blessing to bear his burden.

You see, service for Christ is not a rest from work but a rest in work; not the rest of inactivity but the joy of harmony as our faculties and affections find delight, satisfaction and development in serving the lovely Savior.

Does a man feel in bondage when he has married a wife whom he loves more than life itself? Of course not. The delight of his heart is to be joined in mutual obligation and commitment to her. Commitment to Christ is a blessing, not a burden. There is the only place a

person can ever find true rest.

I counsel you to take the “yoke” of Christ upon you and assume the “burden” He has assigned you. You will find such relief and release flood your spirit that service for Him becomes the greatest freedom you have ever known.

Hear and respond to His invitation of grace: *“Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light”* Matthew 11:28-30.

Jeremiah 33:3: THE EXPERIENCE OF PRAYER

Let us learn not to rebel against times of trouble. Such are often times of greatest spiritual blessing. It was in such a time that God gave one of the greatest prayer promises recorded in the Old Testament. The account is recorded in chapter 33 of the writings of the prophet Jeremiah.

“Moreover the word of the Lord came unto Jeremiah the second time, while he was yet shut up in the court of the prison, saying, Thus saith the Lord the maker thereof, the Lord that formed it, to establish it; the Lord is his name; call unto me, and I will answer thee, and show thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not” Jeremiah 33:1-3.

It was when Jeremiah was shut up in prison for resisting the evil ways of a wicked king that the word of the Lord came to him. It was in his darkest hour, when his political enemies had resolved to secure his death and he had been delivered by the evident work of God, that the Lord gave him the prayer promise.

Listen to that promise. *“Call unto me, and I will answer thee, and show thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not”* Jeremiah 33:3. That prayer promise belonged to the prophet Jeremiah, but it also belongs to you and me. I have chosen it as one of my “Favorite Texts of the Bible.”

Continue to pray

“Call unto me,” God invites. Do not give up because circumstances are discouraging. Keep your attention heavenward and address your prayers to God Himself.

Prayer is the most demanding duty and precious privilege the Christian has. The text is not a call to duty, however, so much as it is a revelation of privilege. Even if we had no sins, no wants, no enemies, no needs, prayer would still be a delight and privilege.

It is a gracious condescension of God which moves Him to invite us to continue to call upon Him. He never rebukes that we ask too much or that we ask too often. His only rebuke is that we do not ask at all or we ask amiss.

Oh, how we need to pray! Someone has said, “A prayerless heart is a fort deserted.” Many of us have regretted, after it was too late to change, that we went through an experience without truly praying about it. We need to pray not only because of what we can get from God in answer to petition but also because of what we can enjoy in God by fellowship and worship in prayer.

Have you prayed? Continue to pray. Have you received no answer? Continue to pray. Have you received the thing which you requested? Continue to pray. The greatest privilege of your life is to speak with God in prayer.

You need it, and God desires it. He invites you, “Call upon me.” If you were as sinless

as Adam and as sufficient as Christ, prayer would still be the highest privilege and happiest experience of your life. Jesus said, *“Men ought always to pray, and not to faint”* Luke 18:1. Therefore, continue to pray.

Expect an answer

Expect an answer to prayer. If there were no answer to prayer, it would be an exercise in futility. But God accompanies His invitation (*“Call unto me”*) with a promise (*“I will answer thee”*).

Who will answer prayer? God said, *“I will answer thee.”* What a promise! He will personally listen to our prayers, and He will personally answer them. It is almost too good to be true. Prayer is communion with the sovereign God of the universe. He hears and responds when we pray.

Prayer is the way God has appointed for us to receive what we need. The words of Jesus are recorded in Matthew 7:7, 8, saying, *“Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: for every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.”* How can I receive, find and find the way opened? Only when I ask, seek and knock. But God has assured me and you that any time we ask, seek and knock, we certainly shall receive, find, and the way will be open. He gives in response to our asking.

The answer from God may not come at the time we designate nor in the manner we expect nor by the plan we desire, but it will come. God will excite no desire in us which He will not fulfill. Ask, and He will answer.

Expect great things

Expect great things in answer to prayer. Notice the latter part of the great prayer promise of Jeremiah 33:3: *“Call unto me, and I will answer thee, AND SHOW THEE GREAT AND MIGHTY THINGS, WHICH THOU KNOWEST NOT.”* That is a promise of answer to prayer which reaches beyond our thoughts or expectations.

Divine things come in answer to prayer. *“I will show thee,”* God promised. God moves in answer to prayer. Jesus said, *“Whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, THAT WILL I DO, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I WILL DO IT”* John 14:13, 14. Again, Jesus said, *“Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, HE WILL GIVE IT YOU . . . ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full”* John 16:23, 24. We ask and God acts. That is the way prayer works.

Great things come in answer to prayer. *“I will show thee GREAT and MIGHTY things,”* God promised. *“Great”* things mean big things, abundant things, many things, precious things, vast things and things which know no bounds. *“Mighty”* things indicate things requiring power, strength, force, ability and authority. God promised both *“great”* things and *“mighty”* things in answer to your prayers. Why do we delay to pray? We can see the power of God manifest in answer to prayer.

Unknown things come in answer to prayer. I will *“show thee great and might things, WHICH THOU KNOWEST NOT,”* God promised. Things that are hidden will be revealed when we pray. Workings of God which we have never seen will be revealed when we pray. Plans and purposes of God of which we have no idea will become clear when we pray. God only knows how much His children miss because they neglect the privilege of prayer.

Remove any question from your mind at this point. God answers prayer.

I know not by what methods rare,
But this I know—God answers prayer.
I know that He has given His Word,
Which tells me prayer is always heard,
And will be answered, soon or late,
And so I pray and calmly wait.
I know not if the blessing sought,
Will come in just the way I thought.
But leave my prayers to Him alone,
Whose will is wiser than my own,
Assured that He will grant my quest,
Or send some answer far more blest.—anonymous

It is said that Sir Walter Raleigh came before Queen Elizabeth to request her to finance one of his expeditions. She asked, “Raleigh, when will you leave off your begging?” And he replied, “When her majesty leaves off her giving.”

Do not quit praying until God quits answering, and you will never quit praying at all. God invites, “*Call unto me, and I will answer thee, and show thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not*” Jeremiah 33:3.

Matthew 18:19, 20: GOD’S TWO OR THREE

Jesus said, “*Again I say unto you, That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father, which is in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them*” Matthew 18:19, 20.

I stand amazed at the thought of such a wonderful promise of God to answer prayer. And I stand the more amazed at the realization that I have seen this very promise honored as God heard and answered the petition offered by two of His believing children who claimed it and asked Him to work.

Because I have experienced the fulfillment of this promise in my own life, I felt compelled to include it among my “Favorite Texts of the Bible.”

Consider, first, the promise itself. I express its meaning in my own words: “If any two of you agree to ask God about anything, whatever you shall ask, it will come to pass and certainly be done for you by My Father who is in heaven.”

It is not necessary to get many people praying in order for God to move in response to prayer. If no more than two people agree on a matter, they can claim this promise.

It is not necessary to limit petitions to special religious matters. Jesus said we could pray about “anything” which is of concern to us.

Let us suppose that there is a matter of great concern to you. Let us suppose that you want to ask God to intervene in the matter to make it work out right. Let us suppose that there is another person (your husband or wife, your brother or sister, your relative or friend) who shares your concern about that same issue. Jesus said the two of you could enter a covenant of prayer about the matter and that God would certainly do what you ask Him. It is an amazing promise, but that is evidently what it is saying to you and me.

The kind of person who can be one of “God’s two or three”

Not every one can claim that promise and receive the answer. There are certain qualities which one must possess in order to claim God’s promises of prayer. Let us examine some of them that we might be sure we possess them when we pray.

There must be faith. *“Without faith it is impossible to please him”* Hebrews 11:6. Therefore, Jesus commanded, *“What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them”* Mark 11:24. And James warned of doubting when praying, saying *“Let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord”* James 1:6, 7. So, settle once-for-all the issue in your heart. The promise is recorded in Holy Scripture. God would not have made the promise unless He was able and willing to fulfill it. Therefore, we can ask, and God will answer.

There must be burden. Nothing short of a heart-deep concern will enable a person to pray this prayer-promise effectively. There must be a burden like the Lord Jesus had when He wept over Jerusalem (Luke 13:34) or like Paul had when he testified to *“great heaviness and continual sorrow”* of heart over his kinsmen who did not know Jesus Christ Romans 9:2. A light-hearted, unconcerned prayer is not sincere and will not claim God’s promises in truth. Sincere concern must fill the heart of one who claims this prayer-promise.

There must be covenant. Jesus said the two who claim this promise must “agree” concerning that which they ask. That word “agree” means to “sound together” as musical instruments in an orchestra. Some translators have worded it: “If two of you on earth symphonize your praying” (Montgomery, Centenary translation). The two must “sound together.” That does not mean that they must speak at the same time but that what they speak must be in the same spirit. They must ask for the same thing.

I suggest that two people covenant together concerning the object of their petition and even the time of their praying. There is strength in praying at the same hour each day. Let them get together to pray as often as possible. Unity is essential. Let them covenant to pray together for the item of concern and continue to pray until the asked-for-blessing comes.

They must meet the requirements for prayer. God has set out guidelines by which we are assured of answered prayer. Let us be forgiving toward others, trustful toward God, free from any sin, coming in the name of Jesus, and praying in the will of God. That means we must have our own hearts right toward God if we would claim this prayer-promise.

The promises God makes to His “two or three”

There are two great promises God makes to the persons who could claim His promise of Matthew 18:19.

He promises to give them the thing for which they ask. Listen again to the text: *“If two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven.”* I do not know how God could say it any more clearly: *“It shall be done.”* That leaves no room for doubt. The statement is emphatic. God stakes His integrity upon it. He will grant the petition which His “two or three” ask of Him.

He promises to meet with them while they are praying about the issue. Jesus said, *“For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.”* I have often used, and heard others use, that text to encourage those present when attendance was low in a church meeting. And it is valid to apply there, I suppose. But that was not what Jesus was saying when He made the statement. He was talking about “two or three” gathering to claim a

promise of God and to ask a specific petition of God. “I am with you, even when no more than two or three of you meet to claim the Father’s promise and pray. I Myself am personally present with you there in the prayer meetings.” Thank God for His blessed presence when we claim His promise and pray!

God is looking for “two or three” today

Promises in Holy Scripture were not reserved for Bible times. Not at all! They are as valid today as they were then. This blessed promise to hear and answer the prayer of “two or three” is for you and me today.

I think God wants to show our skeptical generation what He can do in answer to the prayers of His people. He wants to bless His children by answering their prayers at the same time He answers the needs of people in response to prayer.

Do you have a burden for some matter of great concern? Is there a need you know? Is there a problem you cannot solve? Is someone in sin whose rebellion against God breaks your heart? And is there someone who shares that burden which you bear? If so, you are ready to claim this promise.

Seek out the person who is likeminded with you. Share this prayer-promise of Matthew 18:19 with him. Ask that person to join you in petition for God to answer the need and minister to the good of man and the glory of God. Covenant before God to claim this promise and to pray until the answer comes. God has committed Himself to hear and answer your prayers.