



God spake these words to Cyrus the Great of Persia (and to you and me): ² *I will go before thee, and make the crooked places straight: I will break in pieces the gates of brass, and cut in sunder the bars of iron:* ³ *And I will give thee the treasures of darkness, and hidden riches of secret places, that thou mayest know that I, the LORD, which call thee by thy name, am the God of Israel.* ⁴ *For Jacob my servant's sake, and Israel mine elect, I have even called thee by thy name: I have surnamed thee, though thou hast not known me.* (Isaiah 45:2-4)

To blind Bartemeus, there was much of the world that was hidden to his notice; but there was more that was made visible to his spirit that was made the keener for his lack of physical vision. When others, with eyes, muddled about the streets of Jericho lost and unseeking, Bartemeus knew when the Lord passed by and vigorously voiced his petition that the Lord would have mercy upon him – and the Lord did more for this understanding blind man than all others present that day. Though blind, Bartemeus was a Christ-seeking man.

One of the purposes of prayer is to reveal to us the unseen. Though we may all have had our mountain-top experiences in prayer, it is the prayer offered up from the Valley of the Shadow of Death that is most earnest and plaintive. It is also the kind of prayer that affords a greater light in a dark place. Today's hymn, *Sweet Hour of Prayer*, relates the beauty of our secret and hidden prayers to God. Of course, the Hour of Prayer is always the present hour. Written by an uneducated, yet powerful minister of the Gospel in England, William Wafford in 1845, this hymn was a family and hearthside favorite in my home, and many others around the world since its being published.

I should point out from the first that the Rev. Wafford could recite entire passages of Scripture, without error, from memory. This was an important gift for this man since Rev. William Wafford was completely BLIND. Once when a friend (Rev. Thomas Salmon) was visiting, Wafford timidly shared the words to this hymn from memory since he could not see to write. Salmon eagerly took down the lyrics and took them personally to be published in the New York Observer. William Bradbury composed the music, *Sweet Hour*.

Sweet Hour of Prayer

Sweet hour of prayer! sweet hour of prayer!
That calls me from a world of care,
And bids me at my Father's throne
Make all my wants and wishes known.
In seasons of distress and grief,
My soul has often found relief
And oft escaped the tempter's snare
By thy return, sweet hour of prayer!

Sweet hour of prayer! sweet hour of prayer!
The joys I feel, the bliss I share,
Of those whose anxious spirits burn
With strong desires for thy return!
With such I hasten to the place
Where God my Savior shows His face,
And gladly take my station there,
And wait for thee, sweet hour of prayer!

Sweet hour of prayer! sweet hour of prayer!
Thy wings shall my petition bear
To Him whose truth and faithfulness
Engage the waiting soul to bless.
And since He bids me seek His face,
Believe His Word and trust His grace,
I'll cast on Him my every care,
And wait for thee, sweet hour of prayer!

Sweet hour of prayer! sweet hour of prayer!
May I thy consolation share,
Till, from Mount Pisgah's lofty height,
I view my home and take my flight:
This robe of flesh I'll drop and rise
To seize the everlasting prize;
And shout, while passing through the air,
"Farewell, farewell, sweet hour of prayer!"

Sweet hour of prayer! sweet hour of prayer! That calls me from a world of care, And bids me at my Father's throne Make all my wants and wishes known. In seasons of distress and grief, My soul has often found relief And oft escaped the tempter's snare By thy return, sweet hour of prayer! If we are not on good terms with an old and faithful friend, we may be reluctant to ask him of some great favor, but there may be no one else to which to turn. We are more emboldened to go before God with our prayerful petitions if we have been faithful in love and worship to Him. But even in times when we have been disobedient, we may turn in contrition to that "Friend that sticketh closer than a brother" for succour of soul. In quiet and humble prayer, the cares of the world fall harmlessly aside. After all, we are at our Father's Throne, and no evil can beset us in that Strong Fortress.

As children, we may, with carefree abandon, unload the burdens of our souls upon our loving Father. Our heavenly Father, much like our earthly ones, may not grant all of our wants and wishes (though we make them known); for He is a good and wise Father who knows when our great NEED conflicts with our wants and wishes. I have never

ended a prayer with the same sorrow with which I began it. There is a silent solace that attends prayer even under extreme circumstances. That solace comes from God. The more regular are our prayers, the less frequent are our sins and the temptations thereof. On the very night of our dear Lord's betrayal, He warned His disciples to pray that they not fall into temptation: ³⁹ *And he came out, and went, as he was wont, to the mount of Olives; and his disciples also followed him.* ⁴⁰ *And when he was at the place, he said unto them, Pray that ye enter not into temptation.* (Luke 22:39-40) I have discussed that the hour of prayer has kept my formerly youthful soul from many sins and temptations, and it still does!

Sweet hour of prayer! sweet hour of prayer! The joys I feel, the bliss I share, Of those whose anxious spirits burn With strong desires for thy return! With such I hasten to the place Where God my Savior shows His face, And gladly take my station there, And wait for thee, sweet hour of prayer! The solitude and serenity we enjoy in close and prayerful communion with God is one beyond earthly description. There are no earthly words to describe it because it is not an earthly experience. The good minister who composed this hymn had many among his flock who earnestly and fervently desired the soon return of our Lord. Do we have such longings, friend? Have we not prayed for the same at least within the last week? Did we not pray: *Thy kingdom come; thy will be done, on earth as it is in Heaven.* That prayer can only be fully realized with the return of the Lord Jesus Christ! If we do not desire the soon return of Christ, we need to consider our soul's state of grace with the Lord.

We do, indeed, meet our Lord in prayer; but we are not there on our knees simply to voice our wants and needs. It is a two way discourse. We must wait upon His response and not simply provide Him with a laundry list of our needs. Sometimes, answers to prayer are not as immediate as a fast-foods order. We must wait upon the Lord to see His will and plan for us. As Hannah prayed with silent lips at the altar, so must we be silent to hear the Voice of God in responding.

Sweet hour of prayer! sweet hour of prayer! Thy wings shall my petition bear To Him whose truth and faithfulness Engage the waiting soul to bless. And since He bids me seek His face, Believe His Word and trust His grace, I'll cast on Him my every care, And wait for thee, sweet hour of prayer! Our prayers are wafted on high as on wings of a dove. This was symbolized by the rising incense from the altar of the Wilderness Tabernacle. That smoke represented the combined prayers of the people rising to God. We can in no wise trust His grace until we have believed His Word. So many today profess an 'easy-believism' that requires no knowledge of God and His word at all. Simply believe, the TV evangelist says – but in WHAT. We must know in whom we have believed. *I am not ashamed: for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day.* (2 Tim 1:12) How can we know in whom we have believed if we do not know His Word that describes Himself? That soul that waits upon God will not be disappointed. Casting all of our cares upon His own scarred and bruised shoulders, we shall never fail to be relieved of our burdens. ⁶ *Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time:* ⁷ *Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you.* (1 Peter 5:6-7) Out of His abundant love for us, He provides all our needs, and takes every burden.

Sweet hour of prayer! sweet hour of prayer! May I thy consolation share, Till, from Mount Pisgah's lofty height, I view my home and take my flight: This robe of flesh I'll drop and rise To seize the everlasting prize; And shout, while passing through the air, "Farewell, farewell, sweet hour of prayer. The sorrowful words of the preacher proclaim the sad and supposedly final state of poor Moses on Mount Nebo of Pisgah: ²⁵ *I pray thee, let me go over, and see the good land that is beyond Jordan, that goodly mountain, and Lebanon.* ²⁶ *But the LORD was wroth with me for your sakes, and would not hear me: and the LORD said unto me, Let it suffice thee; speak no more unto me of this matter.* ²⁷ *Get thee up*

into the top of Pisgah, and lift up thine eyes westward, and northward, and southward, and eastward, and behold it with thine eyes: for thou shalt not go over this Jordan. (Deut 3:25-27)

Moses died on that Mount Pisgah! And what a death it was. He was secretly buried by God in Moab after leading the children for forty years in the Wilderness. He was not allowed to enter the Promised Land, but was left in a lonely grave in Moab – or WAS he? Do we see Moses again in Scripture after that Mountain of Prayer experience? Yes, we certainly do, and Moses is on yet another Mount – the Mount of Transfiguration with our Lord! *1 And after six days Jesus taketh Peter, James, and John his brother, and bringeth them up into an high mountain apart, 2 And was transfigured before them: and his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light. 3 And, behold, there appeared unto them Moses and Elias talking with him. (Matt 17:1-3)* The faithful Moses was left in no lonely grave in Moab, but went to a far better land of Promise than that drab little country beyond Jordan Banks. Prayer affords us a view of heaven just as surely as Mount Pisgah offered Moses a view of the Promised Land. When Moses died on Mount Nebo of Pisgah, he traded that wrinkled old robe of flesh for a spanking new, and clean, Robe of righteousness offered to Him by our Lord Jesus Christ! Our prayers will then no longer be offered in blindness of the majesty and brilliance of God, but face to face.

May the Lord grant us blindness to the torrid things of this world and give us keener vision of the things of Heaven. *Amen.*