

## DOES GOD HEAR PRAYER? (excerpts)

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typed by Anna Lee James - 2002

### I.

The time has come for all of us who believe in prayer, and especially for those of us who have been preaching it as the greatest force in the universe, to pause and take inventory of what all our preaching and all our praying has accomplished. Has it been worth it? Was Jesus merely talking in figures of speech when he said, "Ask and ye shall receive"?

Indeed, the most vital question for all of us to face during these years of crisis is this: Has God let us down?

If prayer has the power that we believe it has, that Jesus said it has, why has God failed to hear our prayers in this hour of the world's greatest need? The answer to that question must be unequivocal and unconditional. The answer must be in terms of solid realities, solid truths and solid facts. It cannot be in the realm of guess work, fantasies, or wishful thinking. There can be no hedging, no dodging. The world deserves an honest answer and nothing else will satisfy. We have trusted God's word, we have lived by it, we have tried to get the world to accept it. And now has it failed us?

God's answer to that is simple, direct and inescapable:

"I HAVE NOT FAILED YOU, BUT MAN HAS."

I think it would be quite easy to prove that God's law works if we give it time enough. We all know, for instance, that the influence of Jesus upon the cross has outlasted the influence of Herod's upon the throne. We all know that after seven years Washington, who lost all his battles, won his campaign, and that after twenty years Napoleon, who won all his battles, lost his campaign. But now we have been praying for three years for God to bring an end to oppression, injustice, persecution and war, and the more we pray, the worse the world situation seems to grow. That is the reason that I say that the time has come when we should pause a moment and ask the question: Does God hear prayer? Have our prayers for justice and peace during the past three years had any power? Have they been as futile as the scoffers would make us believe?

After Jesus hung on the cross all the disciples ran off and left him. Peter said, "Let us forget this man who believed in prayer but who could not even save himself. Let us go back to our fishing."

Should we, likewise, drop our faith in prayer and go back to our fishing?

Many of us have. Hundreds of our spiritual leaders who used to believe in the prayer-way of settling disputes have declared themselves now for out-and-out war. All around me I see men and women of earnest and conscientious faith and sincerity dropping the teachings of Jesus as so much "wishful thinking" and returning to their fishing.

I said above that God has not failed us, but Man has. I shall now tell you what I mean.

In the summer of 1939 when war seemed imminent, at the two Camps Farthest Out at Lake Koronis and Star Island, we had the opportunity to put the promises of Jesus to the test. We prayed. We prayed with power, with more unity of fellowship, with more faith in God than I think we have ever prayed at the Camps before. And GOD HEARD OUR PRAYER. And how do we know? Because God stopped the war. All that prayer needed to do, all that prayer was supposed to do, prayer accomplished. The war was stopped, and on terms fair to all, and God alone stopped it. Then why did it not stay stopped? Because while God stopped the war, man started it all over again. God stopped the war before a single soldier was shot or a single gun fired. He prepared easy steps for a negotiated peace for all of Europe on a basis that could have been made fair and merciful and just to all had Man just prayed enough. But Man refused to listen to God speaking.

And the result has been the humiliation and near destruction of France, the massacre of Poland, the misery and starvation of Holland, Finland and Norway and Denmark, and last but not least, the threat to the British Isles of the most awful destruction of life and property that the world has ever known. Because Man would not listen to God that day, we are now in a deadlock where even if the causes we favor should win, what likelihood would there be of our ability to force a peace free from rancor, bitterness, revenge and hate, a peace that might not be a prelude to another war twenty years hence?

And when did God stop the war?

The time has come when I should speak forth without equivocation or apology, or false humility. The time has come when I should proclaim to all the world that God has answered prayers, not only answered prayers in the distant future, but in the immediate present. And what is more, he has done it in a way that can brook no doubt, no evasion, no rebuttal. We are talking in terms of absolute fact, absolute reality and absolute truth. We are depending only upon witnesses whose word is above reproof, upon documents that can be found in archives of merit and upon experts in their field who can verify every word we have to speak on this matter.

Then how did God stop the war? And what part did prayer have to play in it?

The summer of 1939 one hundred people who believed in prayer came from all over the nation to Lake Koronis, Minnesota and spent many days in putting their entire lives in as complete alignment and surrender to God as they knew how. Then, and not until then, did we pray for the Love-way to prevail over the War-way in Europe and in the world. There was power in that prayer. A few weeks later one hundred and fifty people who believed in the power of prayer gathered on Star Island and humbly put their lives in as complete surrender and alignment with God as they knew how.

And then came the miracle!

The prayer that we prayed at these camps did not consist merely in the putting into orderly adjustment of a few words in a sentence and the directing of that sentence toward God. Prayer as we practiced it consisted of the orderly adjustment of all one's purposes and acts in one's life toward God. The first is wishful thinking. The other is prayer that prevails.

At the camps that summer, as I said before, our prayers had taken a high and inspired

turn—higher than we had ever gone before. And, as I said before, they transcended words. No words were great enough to confine our prayers. We had to resort to silences, to parables, to symbols. Our final prayer at both camps took the form of a parable. Jesus talked in parables, and without a parable spake he not unto them.

The parable prayer at Lake Koronis was planned and carefully carried out, a simple, sincere prayer to the heavenly Father, and a simple, symbolical, parabolic broadcast of Love to our brothers across the sea. But the parable prayer on Star Island was unpremeditated, unplanned. God alone planned it, and the Holy Spirit must have carried it out.

It happened on a night on Star Island when the camp period had nearly come to an end. A stunt night had been arranged, for pure relaxation, enjoyment and good fellowship. We went to it as little children, filled with simple love for each other and genuine joy in the lovely surroundings and happy fellowship that we were sharing. We gathered that evening in the mood of happy expectancy that one experiences when he puts his over-serious, adult nature aside and lets his spontaneous, childlike nature have full sway for a season. I know now what Jesus meant when he said, “Unless you turn and become as a little child, ye are not worthy to enter the Kingdom of Heaven.” Five stunts were put on that night, one by the people who came from the Middle and Far West, one by the New England group, one by those from south of the Mason and Dixon line, one by the people from the Middle Atlantic states and one by those who came from the state of New York.

The New York group had devised a stunt that they thought would convulse all in merriment and “bring down the house.” It was to be a take-off of Hitler, together with a few good-natured flings at my talks on “Love your enemies.”

Hitler with his little mustache came upon the stage surrounded with his henchmen. First he commanded that a Jew be persecuted, and a “boomerang” knocked down one of his own guard. Next he commanded a university professor be interned in a prison camp, and again the “boomerang” swung back upon his own guards. Then Goering said, “You are wonderful. Where do you get your wonderful ideas?” Proudly Hitler replied, “I have a secret. I tune in to the cosmic forces of the universe. Let me show you how.” And he seated himself, bending forward, till his ear touched the table before him as one catching messages not open to others.

As he did so a back curtain opened and four young women with arms upraised, facing the four points of the compass were revealed “broadcasting love” to Hitler.

Hitler stirred uneasily. He seemed puzzled. Then he raised his head and said, “I am getting something different . . . something I never got before.” Finally he sat up and said, “I am going to surprise you. But after all, I am always surprising people. Why not give you a big surprise while I am about it? Command the police to stop persecuting the Jews. Tell them to release all the captives from the prison camps . . . .”

And as he spoke and continued speaking, a strange spiritual power began to fill the hall. It continued to increase in power until the entire building became a veritable house of prayer.

Of course the little hall was darkened for this play. All save the actors on the stage were shrouded in darkness, and absolute silence reigned. They say that man in his highest moments

drops words and resorts to symbols. So did Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration. We were resorting to a symbol of love for all the world in a room of exalted silence.

I was standing in the back of the darkened room. Glenn Harding, our leader of singing, felt his way to me and said, "I have never felt greater spiritual power in all my life." Miss Elizabeth Lee, now the Methodist general secretary in charge of all foreign missionary work of the Methodist Board in the entire continents of Europe, Africa, and South America, felt her way to me and said, "I know that something is happening to Hitler this very hour and this very minute."

The next day when the Boston Transcript arrived from the mainland, the headlines were flashing the news of a complete change of policy by Hitler. The lead article on the front page expanded these headlines into an account of how Hitler's army, under orders to march into Poland at 4:30 in the morning for the most smashing blitzkrieg in the history of the world, was suddenly stopped. In the dead of night Hitler had countermanded the order. He had not only halted his soldiers before they had started, but he had reopened telephone communications which had been closed for seven hours between Berlin and Paris. He reopened negotiations promising Britain and France that if they would not declare war he would request a plebiscite to determine what lands should be ceded from Poland to Germany. This plebiscite was to be held not earlier than a year from that date under a neutral commission composed of representatives from England, France, Russia and Italy.

What he asked for was a fraction of what, when provoked to war, he finally did take,--- merely the Danzig corridor and a very little more,--- territories which many neutral authorities thought it only just for Germany to have.

Think of what this offer meant! It would have ended all threat of war under its modern and hideous guise for at least a year and ultimately would bring adjustment of the Versailles provisions regarding Poland that Lloyd George had considered untenable. Just think what an entire year would have meant to Britain in her race to overtake Germany's superiority in airplanes and munitions of war! Think further what might have occurred during that year to bring peaceful adjustment of all the conflicting claims.

No one can read history ten years from now, no one can read history even today, without having to admit that prayer did stop the war, and, moreover, did stop the war before it had even begun. If one can doubt this for one moment, all he need do is to buy a copy of the Boston Transcript of late August, 1939 and read the right hand column of the front page in the lead article of the day the words, "THOSE CLOSE TO HITLER KNOW THE VERY HOUR AND THE VERY MINUTE WHEN HE MADE THIS DECISION. IT WAS AT TWO O'CLOCK IN THE MORNING." That was the identical hour and the identical minute, when one makes allowance for difference in longitude and daylight saving time, that Miss Elizabeth Lee said to me in the darkened room that night, "I know that something is happening to Hitler this very hour and this very minute."

These words I am writing are not wishful thinking, they are not make-believe, they are not fantasy. They are fact. They are truth. They are reality. They deal with the most real thing that there is: Prayer. If one doubts these facts I refer to documents and to witnesses. Go to the files

of the Boston Transcript. Go to the files of the history of the war. Go to the New York offices of the Great Methodist Church and interview Miss Elizabeth Lee. Go to Merom Institute and interview Glenn Haring. Come to Macalester College in Saint Paul and interview Glenn Clark. Out of the mouths of three witnesses who are not accustomed to telling falsehoods, people who have no desire to prove anything that isn't true, whose only desire is to see the reality, the truth, the actual undeniable irrefutable facts of God prevail.

But England and France did not listen to the Voice of Faith in the days that followed. They did not listen to the Voice of God. The Voice of Fear, of Suspicion, of Doubt, of Anger were too loud. The smaller voices drowned out the still small voice of Peace.

Up until now I have always taken pains to make clear to all that I did not blame Britain and France for declaring war. Who am I that I should be passing judgment upon them? They had taken Hitler at his word once and he had failed them. Why trust him again?

But just recently I have had the opportunity of talking these things over with great international authorities and they verify what I had only intuitively felt before and that is that the safeguards and guarantees that Hitler placed about the proposals for the Polish plebiscite were fair and adequate and that we were right who have maintained that the great chance to end war was this hour and this minute before it ever began. The very day that I send this to press, March 6, 1941, General Hugh Johnson writes, "Many students always will believe that the 1939 declaration of war over Poland was one of the most hideous mistakes in timing in all history."

That day on Star Island one hundred and fifty of us prayed and hoped that Great Britain and France would not declare war. Today there is not a man, woman or child in Poland who from the depths of his heart is not wishing that the prayer that night had been heeded by Man as well as by God and that war had never started. There is not a man, woman or child in Holland that does not share that wish; or in Denmark, or in Norway, or in Belgium, or in Finland, or in France, or, I dare say, not even in England.

## II.

And so, after two years of the awfully painstaking task of building up a prayer which like a house of blocks has crashed down because of one false step, not of God, but of Man, what shall we do?

Shall we stop praying?

Now that the house of prayer has fallen, shall we rebuild it again or shall we build in its place a house of hate?

Shall we call prayer mere "wishful thinking" and resort to guns and bombs and poison gas as our only recourse?

Have all the words I have written about David's little slingshot been mere fairy stories for children to play with?

Or shall we take this as the cue that the time has merely come for us to begin?

Edison spent far more than three years building up the incandescent bulb only to find that the filaments he used could not stand heat and were destroyed. Did he give up? Did he say that incandescent lamps were mere wishful thinking? Did he say that his dream of temples of light was merely a fairy story for children to play with? Did he go back to candles and kerosene lamps?

No. He knew that while the filament had failed, the principle of electricity had not failed. Each failure was to Edison merely a signal to start over again. With his first failures he had just begun. His instrument was faulty, but the power from the hills had not failed.

We, too, when we examine the facts of this case will find that man, the instrument, has failed us, but that God, the power from the hills, has not failed. We shall find when we have carefully examined the facts and the witnesses and the documents, that GOD HEARD THE PRAYER. But man failed to follow up what God had started.

If God heard that prayer, he can hear us again. The work for us who believe in prayer has just begun. This message is a message to the people of America, a call to all people, regardless of creed or sect, who believe in God and who believe in prayer, to join in building a prayer for Peace so great that it will be heard not only in heaven where all prayers are heard, but even on earth where today only the guns are heard.

But oh, how great the prayer must be that we must raise to God this time! It must be miles wide and miles deep. It must be a prayer based upon eternal foundations, as deep as plummet ever sounded and wide enough to take in all the world. It must be prayer on our part which is worthy to match, as far as we are able to match, the absolutely matchless promise of God toward His children: "For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is His mercy toward them that fear Him. As far as the East is from the West, so far hath He removed our transgressions from us."

Let us first lay the four cornerstones of Justice, Truth, Humility and Compassion, before we start to build our prayer for the perfect and permanent peace we covet. Great and irresistible then will be the power of the prayer. Military experts inform us that before a great gun can be used to advantage, there must first of all be a broad and deep gun emplacement built upon a foundation strong enough to withstand the shock of any back thrust. How much more is this deep emplacement needed when we are dealing with the mightiest power known to man---the power of prayer. Is there any projectile more tremendous in its might and scope than the prayer that is projected from the heart of man straight to the heart of God?

Let us choose for the first cornerstone upon which this Great Prayer is to be based, the cornerstone of Truth. First of all, we must make sure that these democracies for which we are fighting are true democracies. Let us pray first of all that we in this nation of Washington and Lincoln make our democracy a true democracy. The defense of democracy involves more than the defeat of totalitarianism abroad. It involves the just distribution of benefits at home and a constant vigilance against the tactics of those who seek to turn patriotism to private advantage.

... The second cornerstone to build our Great Prayer upon is the prayer of Honesty. An honest statement of war aims would do much toward preventing another debacle such as we



arrived at Versailles twenty years ago. How can God be asked to help any cause that is so weak, so untruthful, so timid, so selfish, or so hypocritical that it cannot tell in fairly adequate detail what it is fighting for? What does a God whose Son was known as "The Light of the World" think of a so-called Christian people who are so fond of darkness that they cannot bring their war aims out into the light, lest the light should not approve them?

The Christian Century indicates what America's honest war aims might be:

"Complete freedom of the seas; a world-embracing system of virtually free trade; an end of the colonial system or the adoption of processes by which that end might clearly be brought into view, perhaps by extension of the mandate system under safeguards to prevent repetition of the unhappy debauchery of that system which followed Versailles; the establishment of a world court administering codified international law; the unification of Europe; the provision of generous technical and financial help from the United States for the rehabilitation of the devastated portions of Europe and Asia."

Here again, let us not be officious and demanding, but let us pray very, very humbly that in the right way and at the right time the right war-aims may be brought to light. Were this cornerstone clearly placed, before it is too late, the power of the prayer of those who hope for the triumph of democracy would be greatly enhanced.

The third cornerstone might be called one of Compassion, unless some would prefer to call it the stone of Justice... As I look at it, this is not merely a matter of choice, but a matter of law. As ye measure unto others, it shall be measured unto you. As the tides go out they will come back. As ye withhold food from those who served you, when the door is open for you to serve them, you are setting in motion forces that will ultimately prevent the food you need from coming to you...

The fourth cornerstone upon which to build our mighty prayer for a just and permanent peace is the cornerstone of Repentance. Let us pray for true repentance upon the part of the people of the democracies and for t... those living under totalitarian dictatorships So let us pray humbly for repentance and forgiveness.

Upon such a foundation based upon Truth and Honesty, Compassion and Repentance, a prayer projected from the heart of man straight to the heart of God would find nothing in heaven or in earth that could stop it. Such a prayer would be irresistible. Such a prayer would be well-nigh immediate in its fulfillment.

We are now standing upon that high pinnacle where Abraham stood when the Lord told him "Lift up thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art, northward, and southward, and eastward and westward: for all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed forever." And what is the land that we shall see from this high mountain? It is the land pictured by Isaiah and Micah when they wrote: "Thou shalt beat thy spears into plowshares, and thy swords into pruning hooks. Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more."

Let us all join in praying a prayer such as this:

“MAY THE GOD OF LOVE ENTER INTO THE HEARTS OF MEN THE WORLD OVER, MAY JUSTICE BE DONE EVERYWHERE, MAY UNION AND FREEDOM ABIDE TOGETHER ON ALL THE CONTINENTS, AND MAY THE PRINCE OF PEACE RULE OVER ALL THE NATIONS.”

Let us get very, very still after breathing that prayer. Are you not aware of a power greater than can be found in any projectile sent from any gun, however large, a power that transcends the words of man to describe, as this prayer wings its way from the heart of you straight to the heart of God! This very day, this very hour, millions of prayers in these or in similar words are going up from the hearts of men and women the world over. Let us hope that the foundations are deep and wide enough to carry this prayer to the very throne of God!

### CAN WE NOT ACT AS WELL AS PRAY?

Yes, after one has prayed he can do anything that the Spirit moves him to do that will help others. For prayer, if it be true prayer, usually actuates one to do more and do it more energetically than when one does not pray..

If you believe in any of these cornerstones, you can take all kinds of action. You can help to plant the if they appeal to you. You can write letters to congressmen, you can make speeches, you can write books, or you can give wider distribution to the books that are already

...Let us spread books that lay spiritual foundations for the Great Prayer we wish to raise. And here I wish to stimulate an interest in other books besides my own. Someone says that my books reveal the power of God, that Gerald Heard's books reveal the understanding of God, and that Starr Daily's books reveal the love of God. I recommend especially Gerald Heard's intensive study of The Lord's Prayer, in his book, "The Creed of Christ" and his study of the Beatitudes in his book just announced by Harper and Brothers, entitled "The Code of Christ." Let us recommend again Starr Daily's book "Love Can Open Prison Doors," and add to it a very strong recommendation for his new book, "How to Find Power Through Love."