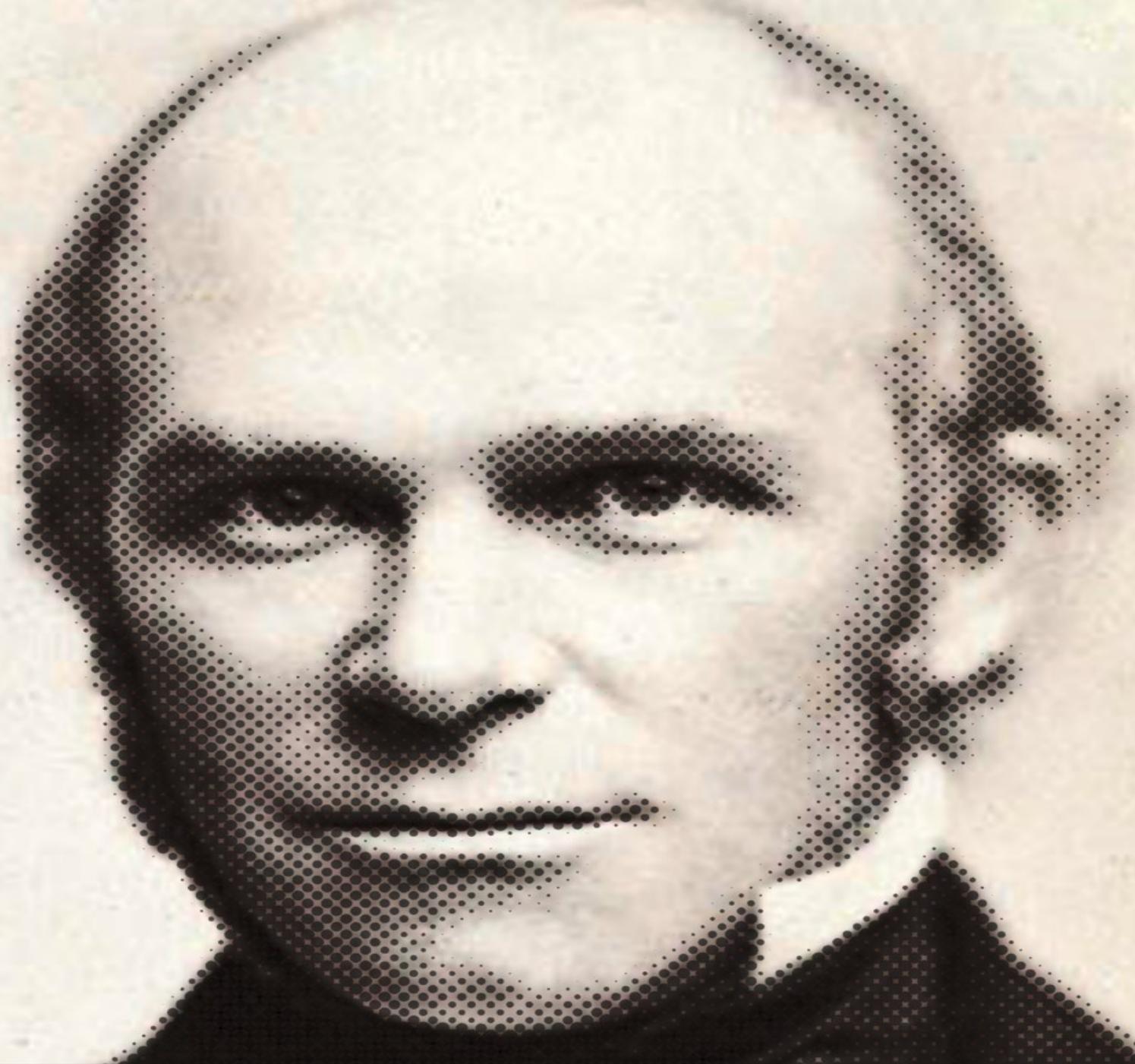


Theodore Parker



*The Collected
Works - Theodore
Parker's Prayers*

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The Collected Works - Theodore Parker's Prayers



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PREFACE.

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SINCE the death, of our minister many of his friends have expressed an earnest desire for the publication of some of his prayers, copies of which were secured during the whole period of his ministry at the Music Hall, and the latter half of that at the Meloieon,—caught in the air as they fell from the lips of the speaker, and faithfully daguerreotyped by friendly hands, and now choicely treasured. From these accumulations of so many years the forty prayers which are included in this volume have been selected, the one at the close being the last that Mr Parker delivered in public.

A greater variety might have been given to the character of this volume by the insertion of other prayers, to the exclusion of some that it now contains; but it is thought that those here given best represent the earnest devotion and the highest aspirations of him who uttered them, presenting, as they do, those themes upon which he most loved to dwell, in sermon or in prayer; and while there is not a very wide range of topics included in the selection, it will be observed that there is much variety in the expression of ideas on the same topics.

The only alterations that have been made in the prayers as originally delivered are, the omission, here and there, of phrases often repeated, the introduction of a few passages from other prayers, and the correction of such slight errors

of expression as are incidental to extemporaneous speaking.

It is believed that this little book will be dearly welcomed, not only by those at whose instance it has been prepared, but by thousands of others who have been "lifted up and strengthened" by these lofty utterances of a great and noble soul.

R. L.

M. G.

Boston, September, 26, 1861.

Prayers March 17, 1850.

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PRAYERS.

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I.

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MARCH 17, 1850.

O THOU Infinite Spirit, who needest no words for man to hold his converse with thee, we would enter into thy presence, we would reverence thy power, we would worship thy wisdom, we would adore thy justice, we would be gladdened by thy love, and blessed by our communion with thee. We know that thou needest no sacrifice at our hands, nor any offering at our lips; yet we live in thy world, we taste thy bounty, we breathe thine air, and thy power sustains us, thy justice guides, thy goodness preserves, and thy love blesses us for ever and ever. Lord, we cannot fail to praise thee, though we cannot praise thee as we would. We bow our faces down before thee with humble hearts, and in thy presence would warm our spirits for a while, that the better we may be prepared for the duties of life, to endure its trials, to bear its crosses, and to triumph in its lasting joys.

We thank thee for the world that is about us, now serene, enlightened by the radiance of day, now covered over with clouds and visited by storms, and in serenity and in storm still guarded and watched and blessed by thee. We adore thee who givest us all these things that we are, and promisest the glories that we are to become. For our daily life we thank thee, for its duties to exercise our hands, for its trials and temptations to make strong our hearts, for the friends that are dear to us,—a joy to us in our waking hours, and in the visions of the night still present, and a blessing still.

We thank thee, O Lord, for thy tender providence which is over us all, for thy loving-kindness which blesses the child and the old man, which regards the sinner with affection, and lovest still thine holy child. Father, we know that we are wanderers from thy way, that we forget thy laws, that oft-times the world has dominion over us, that we are slaves to passion and to every sense. And yet we rejoice to remember that thy kindness is not as our kindness, and thy love is infinite, that thou tenderly carest for thy children, that thou art the Shepherd of the sheep, and in thy bosom bearest the feeble lambs, and gently leadest at last each wanderer back to its home.

We pray thee that we may forgive ourselves for every sin we commit, that with penitence we may wash out the remembrance of wrong, and with wings of new resolution fly out of darkness in the midst of transgression, into the higher, brighter heaven of human duty, of human joy, and of the Christian's peace.

Teach us, Lord, to use this world wisely and faithfully and well. In its daily duties and trials may we find the school for wisdom, for goodness, and for piety. May we learn by every trial that thou sendest, be strengthened by every cross, and when we stoop in sadness to drink bitter waters, may we rise refreshed and invigorated. Help us to live at peace with our souls, disturbing no string on this harp of a thousand chords, but attuning all to harmony, and in our life living one great triumphant hymn to thee. Withhold from us what is evil, though we beg mightily for it, and with tears and prayers. Help us to live in unity with our brother men, reconciling our interest to their interests, by faithfully discharging every duty, by patiently bearing with the weakness or the strength of our brothers, and loving them as we love ourselves. Teach us, Father, to love the unlovely, to love those who evil entreat us, to toil for those who are burdens in the world, and to seek to save them from ignorance, to reform them of their wickedness, and to hasten that time when all men shall recognize that thou art their Father, and their brothers are indeed their brothers, and that all owe fidelity to thee and loving-kindness to their fellowmen. Help us to live in unity with thee, no sloth hiding us from thy presence, no passion turning us aside from thy counsel, but, with mind and conscience, with heart and soul, assimilating ourselves to thee, till thy truth dwells in our understanding, and thy justice enlightens our conscience, and thy love shines a beatitude and a blessed light in our heart and soul for ever and ever.

In times of darkness, when men fail before thee, in days when men of high degree are a lie, and those of low degree are a vanity, teach us, Lord, to be true before thee, not a vanity, but soberness and manliness; and may we keep still our faith shining in the midst of darkness, the beacon-light to guide us over stormy seas to a home and haven at last. Father, give us strength for our daily duty, patience for our constant or unaccustomed cross, and in every time of trial give us the hope that sustains, the faith that wins the victory and obtains satisfaction and fulness of joy.

Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. May thy kingdom come, and thy will be done on earth as it is done in heaven. Give us each day our daily bread. Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from its evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory for ever. Amen.

Prayers August 4, 1850.

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AUGUST 4, 1850.

O THOU Eternal One, whose presence fills all space and occupies all time, who hast thy dwelling-place in every humble heart that trustfully looks up to thee, we flee to thee again to offer thee our morning psalm of thanksgiving and of praise, and to ask new inspiration from thee for days to come, while we stain our sacrifice with penitence for evils that our hands have wrought. Father, may thy spirit pray with us in our prayer, teaching us the things that we ought to ask of thee; may we serve thee faithfully and worship thee aright. Lord, we bow down our spirits before thee, we reverence thine infinite power, we adore thine unbounded wisdom, which understands things past, things present, and to come; we confide in thy perfect justice, knowing that we are safe; but, O Lord, we rejoice in thy love. We bless thee for thy tender mercies, our hearts thank thee for thy loving-kindness, and we reach out the arms of our soul towards thee, knowing that thou art our Father, who lovest us better even than the mothers that have borne us. Lord, we do not know how to praise thee as we ought, for we do not understand all of thy goodness, we cannot

measure all of thy loving-kindness towards us, for it is infinite.

We thank thee for the signs and tokens of thyself which thou hast placed around us everywhere. We thank thee for this lovely day which thou lendest us. We bless thee for the broad green world beneath our feet, for these wondrous heavens above our heads, which nightly thou sowest with starry seed, and every morning limnest with orient light. We thank thee that all these things are a revelation of thee, for day giveth voice unto day, and night speaketh unto night, and the rivers as they roll, and the ocean as it ebbs and floods, and this all-embracing sky,—O Lord, they tell of thy magnitude, they speak of thy power, they talk of thy wisdom, and they charm us with tidings of thy love.

But a greater revelation than this of thyself hast thou made in thy still small voice, which whispers in our soul that all this magnificence is but a drop of thee, yea, a little sparklet that has fallen from thy presence, thou Central Fire, and Radiant Light of all. We know that these outward things are but a sparkle of thy power, a whisper of thy wisdom, a faint breath of thy loving-kindness. Lord, we thank thee that on our soul thou hast writ that thou art our Father, that thy name is Love, that we should not tremble nor fear before thee, but as a child to its mother, so may we turn longingly and lovingly and with unfailing trust to thee. Pardon us that we have known thee no better, that we have trembled when we should have rejoiced, and have been afraid when there was none to molest us nor to make us afraid. Lord, open our inner eye that we may see thee as thou art, touch thou our soul with thine own inspiration

that we may know thee, that we may love thee, that we may serve thee with our daily life.

We remember in our prayer the temptations which every day brings with it, our sorrows, and our trials, and our cares. Arm us for the duty which thou givest us to do, make us strong to bear every cross, patient and earnest to do every day's work in its own day, and to bear ourselves so bravely that we shall always acquit us as men, and so be strong. In our day of passion, we pray thee to deliver us out of its flame and heat, that we come as thy children of old out of the furnace, with no smell of its pollution on our garment's hem. And in the more dangerous period of interest and ambition, we pray thee to save us from its chilling cold and its wintry frost, that we come out not benumbed by its palsy, nor frozen by its snow. Give us wisdom to disperse our darkness, let justice triumph over selfishness in our soul, let duty be supreme over desire, till every desire becomes dutiful and our daily life is one continual sacrament to thee. Father, let a living love of thee dwell in our hearts, let it become strong within us, and lead to a faith that fails not and needs not to be ashamed. May our earthly life be beautiful and acceptable in thy sight, and may our souls be filled with, every spiritual gift from thee; and receiving much, may we give the more, making our lives still more acceptable to thee. Lead us through evil and through good report, bearing the cross which thou layest upon us; and by our prayers, our toil and our tears, change thou us into the glorious image of thyself, that we may be wholly thine, transformed to thee, and thy truth dwell with us, thy justice pitch her tent with us, and thine own loving

kindness charm and enchant our very souls. So may thy kingdom come, and so thy will be done on earth as it is done in heaven.

Prayers October 6, 1850.

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OCTOBER 6, 1850.

OUR Father who art in heaven, thou Soul of our souls, and Safeguard of the world, we flee to thee to sing our morning psalm, to pray our morning prayer, bringing the offering of gratitude from our hearts, and asking of thee the gift of thy holy spirit. Thou sendest down thy sunlight on the world, thou rainest thy rain to still the dust and pacify the stones of the street crying for moisture from the skies, and we know that thou wilt feed our spirits with thine inspiration, ministering truth to the hungry mind, justice to the conscience that asketh right of thee, and wilt pour thy holy love on every earnest, seeking, asking soul.

We thank thee for thy broad providence which cares for the grass in the fields, and adorns every little flower that fringes the hedgerows of life, and carest also for the mighty orbs above our heads and the solid ground beneath our feet; and thyself art not hard to find, nor far to seek, but art with every living soul of man. Father, we thank thee for thy justice which presides over this world, and out of evil bringeth forth good continually, disappointing the wickedness of men, and doing all things for our good. We thank thee for thine unbounded love which caused us to be,

which made this fair world, which waiteth for us in our transgressions, and goes out to meet us, prodigals or penitent, a great way off, and blesses still thy wandering, even unrepentant child. We thank thee for thy voice in our hearts, for the inspiration which thou givest to the sons of men, to show us the way in which we should go, to rebuke us for every folly, to chastise us for every sin, but to encourage everything that is holy and noble and true in our hearts.

We thank thee for the noble examples of human excellence which thou raisest up from time to time, the landmarks of human life, and our guiding lights to lead us safely home to port and peace, to heaven here and heaven at last with thee.

We pray thee that we may be faithful and true to every gift which thou hast given us. In a time of darkness, when great men are a deceit and little men are a lie, may our heart never fail us, nor we hesitate nor despair for a moment of thy goodness and thy truth. Though hand join in hand, teach us that wickedness cannot prosper, nor iniquity endure. Fix our eyes on the true, the right, the holy, the beautiful, and the good, till we love them, and therein love thee with an affection that cannot be ashamed and will not be defeated. Teach us to be blameless in our daily life, to be heroic in our conduct, distinguishing between the doctrines of men and thine everlasting commandments. Help us to love thee, the Creator, more than the creature before our eyes; to imitate thy justice, to share thy truth, and to spread abroad thy living love to all mankind. Are we weak, —and we know we are,—give us strength; sinners,—and

our heart cries out against us,—chastise and rebuke us till we repent of our sin, and come back with humble hearts to worship thee in holiness, in nobleness, and in truth. Give us the love of thyself which shall tread down every passion under its feet that wars against the soul, that shall make our daily lives beneficent, and so cast out every fear, the fear of man, and the fear, Lord, of thee. Help us to know thee in thine immensity, to feel thee and to love thee in thine infinite love, till every weight is cast off from us, and with thy sunshine on our wings we mount up as eagles and fly towards thee. We pray that we may be armed against temptation, and fortified inly for every duty, prepared for every emergency, and ready to serve thee with our limbs and our lives.

We ask thy blessing on all sorts and conditions of men in the various departments of our mortal lives. May the young be trained up in innocence, and taught, not to fear men, but to love their brothers and to love thee. When sundered but joyful souls are by their affection wedded and made one, may a higher life spring up in their united hearts, and may they serve thee with blameless beauty and celestial piety set in a mortal life. In the various trials of our daily business teach us to be honest, and to love men, to respect the integrity of our own souls, and never waver, turned this side by fear of men, and that side by the lust for their praise and their admiration.

We remember the poor and the needy in our prayers; yea, Lord, the poorest and the neediest of all, who own not by human laws their bodies, nor their limbs, nor lives, who flee from the iron house of bondage and ask shelter here

with us. Yea, Lord, their prayer from our lips goes up before thee, asking the rights of man which thou didst give them at their birth, but the oppressor so fraudfully and forcibly rent away. Lord, we are all sinners before thee, but we remember those who with unashamed countenance tread down thy law, who even here seek for the life and freedom of men, and defile the fair heritage which our fathers asked of thee in their prayer and purchased with their sacred blood. Father, we pray thee that thou wilt pity those who have shown no pity, and wilt love those who to their brothers show only hate, treading them with bloody hoofs into the ground, and who with the brow of brass affront thy thunders and blaspheme thy love. Teach us, Lord, our hardest task, to love also these. And our poor brothers, who with chained hands lift up an unchained soul to thee, who flee from city to city, while their persecutors desecrate thy name, who wander from one nation to another kingdom, seeking for the rights of man,—we pray thee that thou wilt guide them in their flight by night, and still by day, and raise up defenders for them here and everywhere. Stir up the souls of noble men that they bewray not him that wandereth, that they hide and shelter the outcast, and are a wall of fire about those who have taken their life in their hands and fled to us for succour, till a band of brothers fold their arms about the needy, and uplift those that are faint and ready to perish in their fall. O Lord, thy charity never faileth. Touch the hearts of men with humanity, that they may learn justice and to love their brothers. Make us nobler, and braver, and holier. Teach us to love all men. So let us be thy children, loving those that hate us, and praying for such as despitefully use us. So may

thy kingdom come, and thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.