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Prayer (Aug 1959)

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The Gospel of Mark is outstandingly the Gospel of the Servant.

It, therefore, is to be expected that through its records we see the perfect Servant of Jehovah, our Lord Jesus, very busy in His work. He is the example of efficiency and earnestness in the performance of His Father's will. He asserted that His will was to do the will of Him that had sent Him and to finish His work. The first recorded words of the Lord Jesus are, "Wist ye not that I must be about My Father's business?" (Luke 2:49).

Mark shows us how busy and full was the life of the Lord Jesus, and that, notwithstanding all this activity, He always made time for prayer. Many who engage in the ministry of the Word of God would not allow either recreation or a hobbie to hinder them from preaching, but they permit these and similar things to keep them from praying.

Several things in this regard may be learned from the practice of our Lord Jesus as recorded in Mark 1:35, "And in the morning, rising up a great while before day, He went out, and departed into a solitary place, and there prayed."

Periods for Prayer

"A great while before day." In my own experience it has been proven that one can live and work without breakfast and suffer no ill effects, but that to face the day without prayer results in defeat and grief.

Prophetically it is said of our Lord, “He wakeneth morning by morning, He wakeneth Mine ear to hear as the learned” (Isa. 50:4). The Lord knew the end from the beginning of the days activities so, with such knowledge, He arose to pray in order that He might carry on.

We might well challenge ourselves as to whether or not prayer has such a priority in our lives. Holy men of God presented to us in the Scriptures were men who arose early to have dealings with the Lord. For example, we read, “And Abraham rose up early in the morning” (Gen. 22:3). Then we read the words of the Psalmist, “In the morning shall my prayer prevent Thee” (Psa. 88:13).

Pre-Arrangements for Prayer

This time for prayer was a fixed practice; it was by choice and not by chance.

Men deliberately set the alarm clock in order to be at work on time. In these days of rush and bustle, it seems just as necessary to make definite arrangements for prayer periods in life. Moses was very specific about such things. It is recorded that he once said to Israel, “Tomorrow I will stand on the top of the hill with the rod of God in mine hand” (Ex. 17:9).

Our Lord arranged to arise early to pray because such holy communion was of primary importance to Him. Frequently our prayers consist of a few hurried words because of the lack of proper habits of prayer. As long as we thus relegate prayer to an obscure place in our lives, it is vain to sing, “Prayer is the Christian’s vital breath.”

Places for Prayer

Of Christ we read in this passage, “He went out, and departed into a solitary place, and there prayed.”

A solitary place may not be easy to find in a small house with a large family. The Lord solved this problem by going outside to find an isolated spot where He could pray to His Father without disturbance. When Peter sought a place to pray undisturbed, he went up unto the roof (Acts 10:9). How long he was there is not stated, but this is revealed, while he was there the Spirit of God gave him directions relative to the work he was to do (Vv. 14-20). That Peter would not have responded to the request for help and have gone with the men to preach the gospel to Cornelius without this experience in prayer, is quite evident.

It is told that Mr. J. R. Caldwell, whose memory is sacred, had a room into which he often retired in order to be alone with God.

Oh! that we might seek the experience expressed by the hymn writer,

“Shut in with Thee, far, far above

The restless world that wars below.”

Practices for Prayer

Out of deep sincerity of heart the Lord Jesus prayed.

There is an old wartime story of a soldier who was accustomed to rise before revelle for prayer. One morning he was found in the woods and was arrested by the Military Police. Before the court he was charged with trying to make contact with the enemy. In his own defence he simply told the truth. The judge was ready to

pass sentence upon him, but before doing so told him that if he ever needed to pray in his life, he needed to do so now, and ordered him there and then to pray.

The soldier dropped upon his knees and reverently and devoutly poured out his heart before the Lord. When he had finished the judge said, “You have done so well on parade, you must have practised much on the square,” and acquitted him.

Elijah was a man of deep sincerity in this holy art of intercession. “Elias was a man of like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly … And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit” (Jas. 5:17-18).

We are instructed by the Lord, “When thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret, and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly” (Matt. 6:6).

So fixed was this habitual practice of prayer in the life of our Lord that the disciples, when they missed Him, seemed to understand where He was and what He was doing (V. 36). This was also true on the night of His betrayal, Judas knew where to find Him. There were at least four occasions on which Christ withdrew Himself from the crowds to quietude for prayer (Mark 1:35; 6:46. Luke 5:16; 6:12). His disciples were so deeply impressed by His actions and His prayers that they asked, “Lord, teach us how to pray.”

In His prayer our holy Lord expressed everything to God but confession. He gave thanks, made supplication, offered praise, and engaged in intercession both for His friends and for His enemies. Our prayers,

notwithstanding what else may characterize them, must be accompanied by confession for we are both sinful and weak. May we, therefore, learn from the divine example of our blessed Lord and follow Him in the constant practice of prayer.