

VI. JESUS CHRIST, THE DIVINE TEACHER OF PRAYER (Continued)

Luke tells us that as Jesus was praying in a certain place, when He ceased, one of His disciples said unto Him, "Lord, teach us to pray." This disciple had heard Jesus preach, but did not feel like saying, "Lord, teach us to preach." He could learn to preach by studying the methods of the Master. But there was something about the praying of Jesus that made the disciple feel that he did not know how to pray; that he had never prayed, and that he could not learn by listening even to the Master as He prayed. There is a profound something about prayer which never lies upon the surface. To learn it, one must go to the depths of the soul, and climb to the heights of God.--A. C. Dixon, D.D.

Let it not be forgotten that prayer was one of the great truths which He came into the world to teach and illustrate. It was worth a trip from Heaven to earth to teach men this great lesson of prayer. A great lesson it was, a very difficult lesson for men to learn. Men are naturally averse to learning this lesson of prayer. The lesson is a very lowly one. None but God can teach it. It is a despised beggary, a sublime and heavenly vocation. The disciples were very stupid scholars, but were quickened to prayer by hearing Him pray and talk about prayer.

The dispensation of Christ's personality, while it was not and could not be the dispensation in its fullest and highest sense of need and dependence, yet Christ did try to impress on His disciples not alone a deep necessity of the necessity of prayer in general, but the importance of prayer to them in their personal and spiritual needs. And there came moments to them when they felt the need of a deeper and more thorough schooling in prayer and of their grave neglect in this regard. One of these hours of deep conviction on their part and of eager inquiry was when He was praying at a certain place and time, and they saw Him, and they said to Him, "Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples."

As they listened to Him praying, they felt very keenly their ignorance and deficiency in praying. Who has not felt the same deficiency and ignorance? Who has not longed for a teacher in the Divine art of praying?

The conviction which these twelve men had of their defect in prayer arose from hearing their Lord and Master pray, but likewise from a sense of serious defect even when compared with John the Baptist's training of his disciples in prayer. As they listened to their Lord pray (for unquestionably He must have been seen and heard by them as He prayed, who prayed with marvelous simplicity, and power, so human and so Divine) such praying had a stimulating charm for them. In the presence and hearing of His praying, very keenly they felt their ignorance and deficiency in prayer. Who has not felt the same ignorance and deficiency?

We do not regret the schooling our Lord gave these twelve men, for in schooling them He schools us. The lesson is one already learned in the law of Christ. But so dull were they, that many a patient iteration and reiteration was required to instruct them in this Divine art of prayer. And likewise so dull are we and inapt that many a wearying patient repetition must be given us before we will learn any important lesson in the all-important school of prayer.

This Divine Teacher of prayer lays Himself out to make it clear and

strong that God answers prayer, assuredly, certainly, inevitably; that it is the duty of the child to ask, and to press, and that the Father is obliged to answer, and to give for the asking. In Christ's teaching, prayer is no sterile, vain performance, not a mere rite, a form, but a request for an answer, a plea to gain, the seeking of a great good from God. It is a lesson of getting that for which we ask, of finding that for which we seek, and of entering the door at which we knock.

A notable occasion we have as Jesus comes down from the Mount of Transfiguration. He finds His disciples defeated, humiliated and confused in the presence of their enemies. A father has brought his child possessed with a demon to have the demon cast out. They essayed to do it but failed. They had been commissioned by Jesus and sent to do that very work, but had signally failed. "And when he was come into the house, his disciples asked him privately, saying, Why could not we cast him out? And he said unto them, This kind can come forth by nothing but by prayer and fasting." Their faith had not been cultured by prayer. They failed in prayer before they failed in ability to do their work. They failed in faith because they had failed in prayer. That one thing which was necessary to do God's work was prayer. The work which God sends us to do cannot be done without prayer.

In Christ's teaching on prayer we have another pertinent statement. It was in connection with the cursing of the barren fig tree:

"Jesus answered and said unto them, Verily I say unto you, if ye have faith, and doubt not, ye shall not only do this which is done to the fig tree, but also if ye shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed and be thou cast into the sea; it shall be done.

"And all things whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive."

In this passage we have faith and prayer, their possibilities and powers conjoined. A fig tree had been blasted to the roots by the word of the Lord Jesus. The power and quickness of the result surprised the disciples. Jesus says to them that it need be no surprise to them or such a difficult work to be done. "If ye have faith" its possibilities to affect will not be confined to the little fig tree, but the gigantic, rock-ribbed, rock-founded mountains can be uprooted and moved into the sea. Prayer is leverage of this great power of faith.

It is well to refer again to the occasion when the heart of our Lord was so deeply moved with compassion as he beheld the multitudes because they fainted and were scattered as having no shepherd. Then it was He urged upon His disciples the injunction, "Pray ye the Lord of the harvest that he would send forth labourers into his harvest," dearly teaching them that it belonged to God to call into the ministry men whom He will, and that in answer to prayer the Holy Spirit does this very work.

Prayer is as necessary now as it was then to secure the needed labourers to reap earthly harvests for the heavenly garnerers. Has the Church of God ever learned this lesson of so vital and exacting import? God alone can choose the labourers and thrust them out, and this choosing He does not delegate to man, or church, convocation or synod, association or conference. And God is moved to this great work of calling men into the ministry by prayer. Earthly fields are rotting. They are untilled because prayer is silent. The labourers are few.

Fields are unworked because prayer has not worked with God.

We have the prayer promise and the prayer ability put in a distinct form in the higher teachings of prayer by our Lord: "If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you."

Here we have a fixed attitude of life as the condition of prayer. Not simply a fixed attitude of life toward some great principles or purposes, but the fixed attitude and unity of life with Jesus Christ. To live in Him, to dwell there, to be one with Him, to draw all life from Him, to let all life from Him flow through us--this is the attitude of prayer and the ability to pray. No abiding in Him can be separated from His Word abiding in us. It must live in us to give birth to and food for prayer. The attitude of the Person of Christ is the condition of prayer.

The Old Testament saints had been taught that "God had magnified his word above all his name." New Testament saints must learn fully how to exalt by perfect obedience that Word issuing from the lips of Him who is the Word. Praying ones under Christ must learn what praying ones under Moses had already learned, that "man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." The life of Christ flowing through us and the words of Christ living in us, these give potency to prayer. They breathe the spirit of prayer, and make the body, blood and bones of prayer. Then it is Christ praying in me and through me, and all things which "I will" are the will of God. My will becomes the law and the answer, for it is written "Ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you."

Fruit bearing our Lord puts to the front in our praying:

"Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye shall go and bring forth fruit and that your fruit shall remain, that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you."

Barrenness cannot pray. Fruit bearing capacity and reality only can pray. It is not past fruitfulness, but present: "That your fruit should remain." Fruit, the product of life, is the condition of praying. A life vigorous enough to bear fruit, much fruit, is the condition and the source of prayer. "And in that day ye shall ask me nothing. Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you. Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name: ask and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full." "In that day ye shall ask me nothing." It is not solving riddles, not revealing mysteries, not curious questionings. This is not our attitude, not our business under the Dispensation of the Spirit, but to pray, and to pray largely. Much true praying increases man's joy and God's glory.

"Whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, I will give," says Christ, and the Father will give. Both Father and Son are pledged to give the very things for which we ask. But the condition is "in His name." This does not mean that His name is talismanic, to give value by magic. It does not mean that His name in beautiful settings of pearl will give value to prayer. It is not that His name perfumed with sentiment and larded in and closing up our prayers and doings will do the deed. How fearful the statement: "Many will say unto me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name cast out devils? and in thy

name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you. Depart from me, ye that work iniquity." How blasting the doom of these great workers and doers who claim to work in His name!

It means far more than sentiment, verbiage, and nomenclature. It means to stand in His stead, to bear His nature, to stand for all for which He stood, for righteousness, truth, holiness and zeal. It means to be one with God as He was, one in spirit, in will and in purpose. It means that our praying is singly and solely for God's glory through His Son. It means that we abide in Him, that Christ prays through us, lives in us and shines out of us; that we pray by the Holy Spirit according to the will of God.

Even amid the darkness of Gethsemane, with the stupor which had settled upon the disciples, we have the sharp warning from Christ to His sluggish disciples, "Watch and pray lest ye enter into temptation. The spirit truly is willing, but the flesh is weak." How needful to hear such a warning, to awaken all our powers, not simply for the great crises of our lives, but as the inseparable and constant attendants of a career marked with perils and dangers on every hand.

As Christ nears the close of His earthly mission, nearer to the greater and more powerful dispensation of the Spirit, His teaching about prayer takes on a more absorbing and higher form. It has now become a graduating school. His connection with prayer becomes more intimate and more absolute. He becomes in prayer what He is in all else pertaining to our salvation, the beginning and the end, the first and the last. His name becomes all potent. Mighty works are to be done by the faith which can pray in His name. Like His nature, His name covers all needs, embraces all worlds, and gets all good.

"Believest thou not that I am in the Father and the Father in me? The words that I speak unto you I speak not of myself: but the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works.

"Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father in me: or else believe me for the very works' sake.

"Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go unto my Father.

"And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son.

"If ye shall ask anything in my name I will do it."

The Father, the Son and the praying one are all bound up together. All things are in Christ, and all things are in prayer in His name. "If ye shall ask anything in my name." The key which unlocks the vast storehouse of God is prayer. The power to do greater works than Christ did lies in the faith which can grasp His name truly and in true praying.

In the last of His life, note how He urges prayer as a preventive of the many evils to which they were exposed. In view of the temporal and fearful terrors of the destruction of Jerusalem, He charges them to this effect: "Pray ye that your flight be not in winter."

How many evils in this life which can be escaped by prayer! How many fearful temporal calamities can be mitigated, if not wholly relieved, by prayer! Notice how, amid the excesses and stupefying influences to which we are exposed in this world, Christ charges us to pray:

"And take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares.

"For as a snare shall it come on all them that dwell on the face of the whole earth.

"Watch ye therefore and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man."

In view of the uncertainty of Christ's coming to judgment, and the uncertainty of our going out of this world, He says: "But of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in Heaven, neither the Son, but the Father. Take ye heed, watch and pray, for ye know not when the time is."

We have the words of Jesus as given in His last interview with His twelve disciples, found in the Gospel of John, chapters fourteen to seventeen, inclusive. These are true, solemn parting words. The disciples were to move out into the regions of toil, and peril, bereft of the personal presence of their Lord and Master. They were to be impressed that prayer would serve them in everything, and its use, and unlimited possibilities would in some measure supply their loss, and by it they would be able to command all the possibilities of Jesus Christ and God the Father.

It was the occasion of momentous interest to Jesus Christ. His work was to receive its climax and crown in His death and His resurrection. His glory and the success of His work and of its execution, under the mastery and direction of the Holy Spirit, was to be committed to His apostles. To them it was an hour of strange wonderment and of peculiar, mysterious sorrow, only too well assured of the fact that Jesus was to leave them. All else was dark and impalpable.

He was to give them His parting words and pray His parting prayer. Solemn, vital truths were to be the weight and counsel of that hour. He speaks to them of Heaven. Young men, strong though they were, yet they could not meet the duties of their preaching life and their apostolic life, without the fact, the thought, the hope and the relish of Heaven. These things were to be present constantly in all sweetness, in all their vigour, in all freshness, in all brightness. He spoke to them about their spiritual and conscious connection with Himself, an abiding indwelling, so close and continuous that His own life would flow into them, as the life of the vine flows into the branches. Their lives and their fruitfulness were dependent upon this. Then praying was urged upon them as one of the vital, essential forces. This was the one thing upon which all the Divine force depended, and this was the avenue and agency through which the Divine life and power were to be secured and continued in their ministry.

He spake to them about prayer. He had taught them many lessons upon this all-important subject as they had been together. This solemn hour

he seizes to perfect his teaching. They must be made to realize that they have an illimitable and exhaustless storehouse of good in God and that they can draw on Him at all times and for all things without stint, as Paul said in after years to the Philippians, "My God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus."