

VI. PRAYING MEN AT A PREMIUM

"Our Redeemer was in the Garden of Gethsemane. His hour was come. He felt as if He would be strengthened somewhat, if He had two or three disciples near Him. His three chosen disciples were within a stone's cast of the scene of His agony; but they were all asleep that the Scripture might be fulfilled--I have trodden the winepress alone, and of the people there was none with Me.' The eight, in the distance, were good and true disciples; but they were only ordinary men, or men with a commonplace call."--Alexander Whyte.

No insistence in the Bible is more pressing than the injunction it lays upon men to pray. No exhortation contained therein is more hearty, more solemn, and more stirring. No principle is more strongly inculcated than that "men ought always to pray and not to faint." In view of this enjoinder it is pertinent to inquire as to whether Christian people are praying men and women in anything like body and bulk? Is prayer a fixed course in the schools of the Church? In the Sunday school, the home, the colleges, have we any graduates in the school of prayer? Is the Church producing those who have diplomas from the great university of prayer? This is what God requires, what He commands, and it is those who possess such qualifications that He must have to accomplish His purposes and to carry out the work of His Kingdom on earth.

And it is earnest praying that had need to be done. Languid praying, without heart or strength, with neither fire nor tenacity, defeats its own avowed purpose. The prophet of olden times laments that in a day which needed strenuous praying there was no one who "stirred up himself to take hold of God." Christ charges us "not to faint" in our praying. Laxity and indifference are great hindrances to prayer, both to the practice of praying and the process of receiving; it requires a brave, strong, fearless and insistent spirit to engage in successful prayer. Diffuseness, too, interferes with effectiveness. Too many petitions break tension and unity, and breed neglect. Prayers should be specific and urgent. Too many words, like too much width, breeds shallows and sand-bars. A single objective which absorbs the whole being and inflames the entire man, is the properly constraining force in prayer.

It is easy to see how prayer was a decreed factor in the dispensations preceding the coming of Jesus, and how that their leaders had to be men of prayer; how that God's mightiest revelation of Himself was a revelation made through prayer. And, finally, how that Jesus Christ, in His personal ministry, and in His relation to God, was great and constant in prayer. His labours and dispensation overflowed with fullness in proportion to His prayers. The possibilities of His praying were unlimited and the possibilities of His ministry were in keeping. The necessity of His praying was equaled only by the constancy with which He practiced it during His early life.

The dispensation of the Holy Spirit is a dispensation of prayer, in a preeminent sense. Here prayer has an essential and vital relation. Without depreciating the possibilities and necessities of prayer in all the preceding dispensations of God in the world it must be declared that it is in this latter dispensation that the engagements and demands of prayer are given their greatest authority, their possibilities rendered unlimited and their necessity insuperable.

These days of ours have sore need of a generation of praying men, a band of men and women through whom God can bring His great and His

greatest movements more fully into the world. The Lord our God is not straitened within Himself, but He is straitened in us, by reason of our little faith and weak praying. A breed of Christian is greatly needed who will seek tirelessly after God,--who will give Him no rest, day and night, until He hearken to their cry. The times demand praying men who are all athirst for God's glory, who are broad and unselfish in their desires, quenchless for God, who seek Him late and early, and who will give themselves no rest until the whole earth be filled with His glory.

Men and women are needed whose prayers will give to the world the utmost power of God; who will make His promises to blossom with rich and full results. God is waiting to hear us and challenges us to bring Him to do this thing by our praying. He is asking us, today, as He did His ancient Israel, to "prove Him now herewith." Behind God's Word is God Himself, and we read: "Thus saith the Lord, the Holy One of Israel, his Maker: Ask of me of things to come and concerning my sons, and concerning the work of my hands, command ye me." As though God places Himself in the hands and at the disposal of His people who pray--as indeed He does.

The dominant element of all praying is faith, that is conspicuous, cardinal and emphatic. Without such faith it is impossible to please God, and equally impossible to pray.

There is a current conception of spiritual duties which tends to separate the pulpit and the pew, as though the pulpit bore the entire burden of spiritual concerns, and while the pew was concerned only with duties that relate to the lower sphere of the secular and worldly. Such a view needs drastic correction. God's cause, its obligations, efforts and successes, lie with equal pressure on pulpit and pew.

But the man in the pew is not taxed with the burden of prayer as he ought to be, and as he must be, ere any new visitation of power come to the Church. The Church never will be wholly for God until the pews are filled with praying men. The Church cannot be what God wants it to be until those of its members who are leaders in business, politics, law, and society, are leaders in prayer.

God began His early movements in the world with men of prayer. He chose such a man to be the father of that race who became His chosen people in the world for hundreds of years, to whom He committed His oracles, and from whom sprang the Promised Messiah. Abraham, a leader of God's cause, was preeminently a praying man. When we consider his conduct and character, we readily see how prayer ruled and swayed this great leader of God's people in the wilderness. "Abraham planted a grove in Beersheba, and called there on the name of the Lord, the everlasting God," and it is an outstanding fact that wherever he pitched his tent and camped for a season, with his household, there he erected the altar of sacrifice and of prayer. His was a personal and a family religion, in which prayer was a prominent and abiding factor.

Prayer is the medium of divine revelation. It is through prayer that God reveals Himself to the spiritual soul today, just as in the Old Testament days He made His revelations to the men who prayed. God shows Himself to the man who prays. "God is with thee in all that thou doest." This was the clear conviction of those who would fain make a covenant with Abraham, and the reason for this tribute was the belief commonly held concerning the patriarch that, not only was he a man of prayer, but a man whose prayers God would answer. This is the summary

and secret of divine rule in the Church. In all ages God has ruled the Church by prayerful men. When prayer fails, the divine rulership falls. As we have seen, Abraham, the father of the faithful, was a prince and a priest in prayer. He had remarkable influence with God. God stays His vengeance while Abraham prays. His mercy is suspended and conditioned on Abraham's praying. His visitations of wrath are removed by the praying of this ruler in Israel. The movements of God are influenced by the prayers of Abraham, the friend of God. Abraham's righteous prayerfulness permits him to share the secrets of God's counsels, while the knowledge of these secrets draws out and intensifies his praying. With Abraham, the altar of sacrifice is hard by the altar of prayer. With him the altar of prayer sanctifies the altar of sacrifice. To Abimelech God said, "Abraham is a prophet, and he shall pray for thee, and thou shalt live."

Christian people must pray for men. On one occasion, Samuel said unto the people, "Moreover as for me, God forbid that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you." Fortunate for these sinful people who had rejected God, and desired a human king, that they had in Israel a man of prayer. The royal way to enlarge personal grace is to pray for others. Intercessory prayer is a means of grace to those who exercise it. We enter the richest fields of spiritual growth and gather its priceless riches in the avenues of intercessory prayer. To pray for men is of divine nomination, and represents the highest form of Christian service.

Men must pray, and men must be prayed for. The Christian must pray for all things, of course, but prayers for men are infinitely more important, just as men are infinitely more important than things. So also prayers for men are far more important than prayers for things because men more deeply concern God's will and the work of Jesus Christ than things. Men are to be cared for, sympathized with and prayed for, because sympathy, pity, compassion and care accompany and precede prayer for men, when they are not called out for things.

All this makes praying a real business, not child's play, not a secondary affair, nor a trivial matter but a serious business. The men who have made a success of praying have made a business of praying. It is a process demanding the time, thought, energy and hearts of mankind. Prayer is business for time, business for eternity. It is a man's business to pray, transcending all other business and taking precedence over all other vocations, professions or occupations. Our praying concerns ourselves, all men, their greatest interests, even the salvation of their immortal souls. Praying is a business which takes hold of eternity and the things beyond the grave. It is a business which involves earth and heaven. All worlds are touched and worlds are influenced by prayer. It has to do with God and men, angels and devils.

Jesus was preeminently a leader in prayer, and His praying is an incentive to prayer. How prominently prayer stands out in His life! The leading events of His earthly career are distinctly marked by prayer. The wonderful experience and glory of the Transfiguration was preceded by prayer, and was the result of the praying of our Lord. What words He used as He prayed we know not, nor do we know for what He prayed. But doubtless it was night, and long into its hours the Master prayed. It was while He prayed the darkness fled, and His form was lit with unearthly splendour. Moses and Elijah came to yield to Him not only the palm of law and prophecy, but the palm of praying. None other prayed as did Jesus nor had any such a glorious manifestation of the divine

presence or heard so clearly the revealing voice of the Father, "This is my beloved Son; hear ye him." Happy disciples to be with Christ in the school of prayer!

How many of us have failed to come to this glorious Mount of Transfiguration because we were unacquainted with the transfiguring power of prayer! It is the going apart to pray, the long, intense seasons of prayer, in which we engage which makes the face to shine, transfigures the character, makes even dull, earthly garments to glisten with heavenly splendour. But more than this: it is real praying which makes eternal things real, close and tangible, and which brings the glorified visitors and the heavenly visions. Transfigured lives would not be so rare if there were more of this transfigured praying. These heavenly visits would not be so few if there was more of this transfigured praying.

How difficult it appears to be for the Church to understand that the whole scheme of redemption depends upon men of prayer! The work of our Lord, while here on the earth, as well of the Apostle Paul was, by teaching and example, to develop men of prayer, to whom the future of the Church should be committed. How strange that instead of learning this simple and all important lesson, the modern Church has largely overlooked it! We have need to turn afresh to that wondrous Leader of spiritual Israel, our Lord Jesus Christ, who by example and precept enjoins us to prayer and to the great Apostle to the Gentiles, who by virtue of his praying habits and prayer lessons is a model and an example to God's people in every age and clime.