

XI. MODERN EXAMPLES OF PRAYER

"When the dragon-fly rends his husk and harnesses himself, in a clean plate of sapphire mail, his is a pilgrimage of one or two sunny days over the fields and pastures wet with dew, yet nothing can exceed the marvelous beauty in which he is decked. No flowers on earth have a richer blue than the pure colour of his cuirass. So is it in the high spiritual sphere. The most complete spiritual loveliness may be obtained in the shortest time, and the stripling may die a hundred years old, in character and grace."--History Of David Brainerd

God has not confined Himself to Bible days in showing what can be done through prayer. In modern times, also, He is seen to be the same prayer-hearing God as aforetime. Even in these latter days He has not left Himself without witness. Religious biography and Church history, alike, furnish us with many noble examples and striking illustrations of prayer, its necessity, its worth and its fruits, all tending to the encouragement of the faith of God's saints and all urging them on to more and better praying. God has not confined Himself to Old and New Testament times in employing praying men as His agents in furthering His cause on earth, and He has placed Himself under obligation to answer their prayers just as much as He did the saints of old. A selection from these praying saints of modern times will show us how they valued prayer, what it meant to them, and what it meant to God.

Take for example, the instance of Samuel Rutherford, the Scottish preacher, exiled to the north of Scotland, forbidden to preach, and banished from his home and pastoral charge. Rutherford lived between 1600 and 1661. He was a member of the Westminster Assembly, Principal of New College, and Rector of St. Andrews' University. He is said to have been one of the most moving and affectionate preachers of his time, or, perhaps, in any age of the Church. Men said of him, "He is always praying," and concerning his and his wife's praying, one wrote: "He who had heard either pray or speak, might have learned to bemoan his ignorance. Oh, how many times have I been convinced by observing them of the evil of insincerity before God and unsavouriness in discourse! He so prayed for his people that he himself says, There I wrestled with the Angel and prevailed."

He was ordered to appear before Parliament to answer the charge of high treason, although a man of scholarly attainments and rare genius. At times he was depressed and gloomy; especially was this the case when he was first banished and silenced from preaching, for there were many murmurings and charges against him. But his losses and crosses were so sanctified that Christ became more and more to him. Marvelous are the statements of his estimate of Christ. This devoted man of prayer wrote many letters during his exile to preachers, to state officers, to lords temporal and spiritual, to honourable and holy men, to honourable and holy women, all breathing an intense devotion to Christ, and all born of a life of great devotion to prayer.

Ardour and panting after God have been characteristics of great souls in all ages of the Church and Samuel Rutherford was a striking example of this fact. He was a living example of the truth that he who prays always, will be enveloped in devotion and joined to Christ in bonds of holy union.

Then there was Henry Martyn, scholar, saint, missionary, and apostle to India. Martyn was born February 18, 1781, and sailed for India August

31, 1805. He died at Tokal, Persia, October 16, 1812. Here is part of what he said about himself while a missionary:

"What a knowledge of man and acquaintance with the Scriptures, and what communion with God and study of my own heart ought to prepare me for the awful work of a messenger from God on business of the soul."

Said one of this consecrated missionary:

"Oh, to be able to emulate his excellencies, his elevation of piety, his diligence, his superiority to the world, his love for souls, his anxiety to improve all occasions to do souls good, his insight into the mystery of Christ, and his heavenly temper! These are the secrets of the wonderful impression he made in India."

It is interesting and profitable to note some of the things which Martyn records in his diary. Here is an example:

"The ways of wisdom appear more sweet and reasonable than ever," he says, "and the world more insipid and vexatious. The chief thing I mourn over is my want of power, and lack of fervour in secret prayer, especially when attempting to plead for the heathen. Warmth does not increase within me in proportion to my light."

If Henry Martyn, so devoted, ardent and prayerful, lamented his lack of power and want of fervour in prayer, how ought our cold and feeble praying abase us in the very dust? Alas, how rare are such praying men in the Church of our own day!

Again we quote a record from his diary. He had been quite ill, but had recovered and was filled with thankfulness because it had pleased God to restore him to life and health again.

"Not that I have yet recovered my former strength," he says, "but I consider myself sufficiently restored to prosecute my journey. My daily prayer is that my late chastisement may have its intended effect, and make me, all the rest of my days, more humble and less self-confident."

"Self-confidence has often led me down fearful lengths, and would, without God's gracious interference, prove my endless perdition. I seem to be made to feel this evil of my heart more than any other at this time. In prayer, or when I write or converse on the subject, Christ appears to me my life and my strength; but at other times I am thoughtless and bold, as if I had all life and strength in myself. Such neglects on our part are a diminution of our joys."

Among the last entries in this consecrated missionary's journal we find the following:

"I sat in the orchard and thought, with sweet comfort and peace, of my God, in solitude, my Company, my Friend, my Comforter. Oh, when shall time give place to eternity!"

Note the words, "in solitude,"--away from the busy haunts of men, in a lonely place, like his Lord, he went out to meditate and pray.

Brief as this summary is, it suffices to show how fully and faithfully Henry Martyn exercised his ministry of prayer. The following may well serve to end our portrayal of him:

"By daily weighing the Scriptures, with prayer, he waxed riper and riper in his ministry. Prayer and the Holy Scriptures were those wells of salvation out of which he drew daily the living water for his thirsty immortal soul. Truly may it be said of him, he prayed always with all prayer and supplication, in the Spirit, and watched thereunto with all perseverance."

David Brainerd, the missionary to the Indians, is a remarkable example of a praying man of God. Robert Hale thus speaks of him:

"Such invincible patience and self-denial; such profound humility, exquisite prudence, indefatigable industry; such devotedness to God, or rather such absorption of the whole soul in zeal for the divine glory and the salvation of men, is scarcely to be paralleled since the age of the Apostles. Such was the intense ardour of his mind that it seems to have diffused the spirit of a martyr over the common incidents of his life."

Dr. A. J. Gordon speaks thus of Brainerd:

"In passing through Northampton, Mass., I went into the old cemetery, swept off the snow that lay on the top of the slab, and I read these simple words:

"Sacred to the memory of David Brainerd, the faithful and devoted missionary to the Susquehanna, Delaware and Stockbridge Indians of America, who died in this town, October 8th, 1717."

"That was all there was on the slab. Now that great man did his greatest work by prayer. He was in the depths of those forests alone, unable to speak the language of the Indians, but he spent whole days literally in prayer. What was he praying for? He knew he could not reach these savages, for he did not understand their language. If he wanted to speak at all, he must find somebody who could vaguely interpret his thought. Therefore he knew that anything he could do must be absolutely dependent upon God. So he spent whole days in praying, simply that the power of the Holy Ghost might come upon him so unmistakably that these people would not be able to stand before him.

"What was his answer? Once he preached through a drunken interpreter, a man so intoxicated that he could hardly stand up. This was the best he could do. Yet scores were converted through that sermon. We can account for it only that it was the tremendous power of God behind him.

"Now this man prayed in secret in the forest. A little while afterward, William Carey read his life, and by its impulse he went to India. Payson read it as a young man, over twenty years old, and he said that he had never been so impressed by anything in his life as by the story of Brainerd. Murray McCheyne read it, and he likewise was impressed by it.

"But all I care is simply to enforce this thought, that the hidden life, a life whose days are spent in communion with God, in trying to reach the source of power, is the life that moves the world. Those living such lives may be soon forgotten. There may be no one to speak a eulogy over them when they are dead. The great world may take no account of them. But by and by, the great moving current of their lives will begin to tell, as in the case of this young man, who died at about

thirty years of age. The missionary spirit of this nineteenth century is more due to the prayers and consecration of this one man than to any other one.

"So I say. And yet that most remarkable thing is that Jonathan Edwards, who watched over him all those months while he was slowly dying of consumption, should also say: I praise God that it was in His Providence that he should die in my house, that I might hear his prayers, and that I might witness his consecration, and that I might be inspired by his example.'

"When Jonathan Edwards wrote that great appeal to Christendom to unite in prayer for the conversion of the world, which has been the trumpet call of modern missions, undoubtedly it was inspired by this dying missionary."

To David Brainerd's spirit, John Wesley bore this testimony:

"I preached and afterward made a collection for the Indian schools in America. A large sum of money is now collected. But will money convert heathens? Find preachers of David Brainerd's spirit, and nothing can stand before them. But without this, what will gold or silver do? No more than lead or iron."

Some selections from Brainerd's diary will be of value as showing what manner of man he was:

"My soul felt a pleasing yet painful concern," he writes, "lest I should spend some moments without God. Oh, may I always live to God! In the evening I was visited by some friends, and spent the time in prayer, and such conversation as tended to edification. It was a comfortable season to my soul. I felt an ardent desire to spend every moment with God. God is unspeakably gracious to me continually. In time past, He has given me inexpressible sweetness in the performance of duty. Frequently my soul has enjoyed much of God, but has been ready to say, Lord, it is good to be here;" and so indulge sloth while I have lived on the sweetness of my feelings. But of late God has been pleased to keep my soul hungry almost continually, so that I have been filled with a kind of pleasing pain. When I really enjoy God, I feel my desires of Him the more insatiable, and my thirstings after holiness the more unquenchable.

"Oh, that I may feel this continual hunger, and not be retarded, but rather animated by every duster from Canaan, to reach forward in the narrow way, for the full enjoyment and possession of the heavenly inheritance! Oh, may I never loiter in my heavenly journey!

"It seems as if such an unholy wretch as I never could arrive at that blessedness, to be holy as God is holy. At noon I longed for sanctification and conformity to God. Oh, that is the one thing, the all!

"Toward night enjoyed much sweetness in secret prayer, so that my soul longed for an arrival in the heavenly country, the blessed paradise of God."

If inquiry be made as to the secret of David Brainerd's heavenly spirit, his deep consecration and exalted spiritual state, the answer will be found in the last sentence quoted above. He was given to much

secret prayer, and was so close to God in his life and spirit that prayer brought forth much sweetness to his inner soul.

We have cited the foregoing cases as illustrative of the great fundamental fact that God's great servants are men devoted to the ministry of prayer; that they are God's agents on earth who serve Him in this way, and who carry on His work by this holy means.

Louis Harms was born in Hanover, in 1809, and then came a time when he was powerfully convicted of sin. Said he, "I have never known what fear was. But when I came to the knowledge of my sins, I quaked before the wrath of God, so that my limbs trembled." He was mightily converted to God by reading the Bible. Rationalism, a dead orthodoxy, and worldliness, held the multitudes round Hermansburgh, his native town. His father, a Lutheran minister, dying, he became his successor.

He began with all the energy of his soul to work for Christ, and to develop a church of a pure, strong type. The fruit was soon evident. There was a quickening on every hand, attendance at public services increased, reverence for the Bible grew, conversation on sacred things revived, while infidelity, worldliness and dead orthodoxy vanished like a passing cloud. Harms proclaimed a conscious and present Christ, the Comforter, in the full energy of His mission, the revival of apostolic piety and power. The entire neighbourhood became regular attendants at church, the Sabbath was restored to its sanctity, and hallowed with strict devotion, family altars were erected in the homes, and when the noon bell sounded, every head was bowed in prayer. In a very short time the whole aspect of the country was entirely changed. The revival in Hermansburgh was essentially a prayer revival, brought about by prayer and yielding fruits of prayer in a rich and an abundant ingathering.

William Carvosso, an old-time Methodist class-leader, was one of the best examples which modern times has afforded of what was probably the religious life of Christians in the apostolic age. He was a prayer-leader, a class-leader, a steward and a trustee, but never aspired to be a preacher. Yet a preacher he was of the very first quality, and a master in the art and science of soul-saving. He was a singular instance of a man learning the simplest rudiments late in life. He had up to the age of sixty-five years never written a single sentence, yet he wrote letters which would make volumes, and a book which was regarded as a spiritual classic in the great world-wide Methodist Church.

Not a page nor a letter, it is believed, was ever written by him on any other subject but religion. Here are some of his brief utterances which give us an insight into his religious character. "I want to be more like Jesus." "My soul thirsteth for Thee, O God." "I see nothing will do, O God, but being continually filled with Thy presence and glory."

This was the continual out-crying of his inner soul, and this was the strong inward impulse which moved the outward man. At one time we hear him exclaiming, "Glory to God! This is a morning without a cloud." Cloudless days were native to his sunny religion and his gladsome spirit. Continual prayer and turning all conversation toward Christ in every company and in every home, was the inexorable law he followed, until he was gathered home.

On the anniversary of his spiritual birth when he was born again, in great joyousness of spirit he calls it to mind, and breaks forth:

"Blessed be Thy name, O God! The last has been the best of the whole. I may say with Bunyan, I have got into that land where the sun shines night and day.' I thank Thee, O my God, for this heaven, this element of love and joy, in which my soul now lives."

Here is a sample of Carvosso's spiritual experiences, of which he had many:

"I have sometimes had seasons of remarkable visitation from the presence of the Lord," he says. "I well remember one night when in bed being so filled, so over-powered with the glory of God, that had there been a thousand suns shining at noonday, the brightness of that divine glory would have eclipsed the whole. I was constrained to shout aloud for joy. It was the overwhelming power of saving grace. Now it was that I again received the impress of the seal and the earnest of the Spirit in my heart. Beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord I was changed into the same image from glory to glory by the Spirit of the Lord. Language fails in giving but a faint description of what I there experienced. I can never forget it in time nor to all eternity.

"Many years before I was sealed by the Spirit in a somewhat similar manner. While walking out one day, I was drawn to turn aside on the public road, and under the canopy of the skies, I was moved to kneel down to pray. I had not long been praying with God before I was so visited from Him that I was overpowered by the divine glory, and I shouted till I could be heard at a distance. It was a weight of glory that I seemed incapable of bearing in the body, and therefore I cried out, perhaps unwisely, Lord, stay Thy hand. In this glorious baptism these words came to my heart with indescribable power: I have sealed thee unto the day of redemption.'

"Oh, I long to be filled more with God! Lord, stir me up more in earnest. I want to be more like Jesus. I see that nothing will do but being continually filled with the divine presence and glory. I know all that Thou hast is mine, but I want to feel a close union. Lord, increase my faith."

Such was William Carvosso--a man whose life was impregnated with the spirit of prayer, who lived on his knees, so to speak, and who belonged to that company of praying saints which has blessed the earth.

Jonathan Edwards must be placed among the praying saints--one whom God mightily used through the instrumentality of prayer. As in the instance of the great New Englander, purity of heart should be ingrained in the very foundation areas of every man who is a true leader of his fellows and a minister of the Gospel of Christ and a constant practicer in the holy office of prayer. A sample of the utterances of this mighty man of God is here given in the shape of a resolution which he formed, and wrote down:

"Resolved," he says, "to exercise myself in this all my life long, viz., with the greatest openness to declare my ways to God, and to lay my soul open to God--all my sins, temptations, difficulties, sorrows, fears, hopes, desires, and everything and every circumstance."

We are not surprised, therefore, that the result of such fervid and honest praying was to lead him to record in his diary:

"It was my continual strife day and night, and my constant inquiry how

I should be more holy, and live more holily. The heaven I desired was a heaven of holiness. I went on with my eager pursuit after more holiness and conformity to Christ."

The character and work of Jonathan Edwards were exemplifications of the great truth that the ministry of prayer is the efficient agency in every truly God-ordered work and life. He himself gives some particulars about his life when a boy. He might well be called the "Isaiah of the Christian dispensation." There was united in him great mental powers, ardent piety, and devotion to study, unequaled save by his devotion to God. Here is what he says about himself:

"When a boy I used to pray five times a day in secret, and to spend much time in religious conversation with other boys. I used to meet with them to pray together. So it is God's will through His wonderful grace, that the prayers of His saints should be one great and principal means of carrying on the designs of Christ's kingdom in the world. Pray much for the ministers and the Church of God."

The great powers of Edwards' mind and heart were exercised to procure an agreed union in extraordinary prayer of God's people everywhere. His life, efforts and his character are an exemplification of his statement.

"The heaven I desire," he says, "is a heaven spent with God; an eternity spent in the presence of divine love, and in holy communion with Christ."

At another time he said:

"The soul of a true Christian appears like a little white flower in the spring of the year, low and humble on the ground, opening its bosom to receive the pleasant beams of the sun's glory, rejoicing as it were in a calm rapture, diffusing around a sweet fragrance, standing peacefully and lovingly in the midst of other flowers."

Again he writes:

"Once as I rode out in the woods for my health, having alighted from my horse in a retired place, as my manner has been to walk for divine contemplation and prayer, I had a view, that for me was extraordinary, of the glory of the Son of God as Mediator between God and man, and of His wonderful, great, full, pure, and sweet grace and love, and His meek and gentle condescension. This grace that seemed so calm and sweet, appeared also great above the heavens. The person of Christ appeared ineffably excellent with an excellency great enough to swallow up all thought and conception, which continued, as near as I can judge, about an hour. It kept me the greater part of the time in a flood of tears and weeping aloud. I felt an ardency of soul to be, what I know not otherwise how to express, emptied and annihilated, to lie in the dust; to be full of Christ alone, to love Him with my whole heart."

As it was with Jonathan Edwards, so it is with all great intercessors. They come into that holy and elect condition of mind and heart by a thorough self-dedication to God, by periods of God's revelation to them, making distinct marked eras in their spiritual history, eras never to be forgotten, in which faith mounts up with wings as eagles, and has given it a new and fuller vision of God, a stronger grasp of faith, a sweeter, clearer vision of all things heavenly, and eternal,

and a blessed intimacy with, and access to, God.