

3/18/56  
M.H.  
A.M.  
"Jesus and Prayer"

Scripture Lesson:-

Text:- "But 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." Matthew 6:6.

Introduction:- Shall we come for a little while to the feet of the One who is the final authority in the practice of prayer. We shall not attempt an extensive discussion of the Master's teaching, but come as the disciples did, saying "Lord, teach us to pray."

Jesus lived a normal prayer life. Everything which goes to make up the complete prayer life was found in the life of Jesus in complete symmetry. Of course, we cannot enter into or understand the full relations of the Son with the Father during the limitations of His earthly career, but we can learn something of what the place of prayer in our lives should be.

His great seasons of prayer were in loneliness apart from His disciples. None of them were fitted to be his prayer comrades. They could not enter into His perfect prayer fellowship, and their sin clouded lives could not know the sweetness and delight of an approach to the Father with never a shadow or memory of a shadow between them. There was upon His part no confession of sin, no plea for forgiveness, no cry for mercy, during all the long hours which He spent alone with the Father.

Our Lord prayed, and prayed much. Not only were there times of holy fellowship, when the human nature of our Lord was made strong for His stupendous tasks, but there were periods of mighty intercession. No one ever prayed for this old world just like Jesus did. He saw, as no other eyes had seen, the horrible bondage and degradation of the race which He had come to save. The work of redemption, with all that it meant, as well as the obstacles in the way, were ever before him.



## I.

Let us look for a moment at the prayer of Gethsemane. We may well take off our shoes and read softly for we are upon thrice-holy ground. There is no prayer just like this prayer under the grey olive trees. All the powers of darkness had been unleashed, all the horrible vileness, all the burden of our sin had been heaped together, the unutterable shame, the nameless guilt of it amazed His soul. The pain, the repulsiveness of the thing He must bear, was in its nearness, almost unendurable to His stainless nature. Yet while all the holy energies of His outraged nature revolted, and His body writhed under the torture of His spirit until the bloody sweat marred His countenance, he prayed. Listen to that prayer. "Abba, Father, all things are possible unto thee; take away this cup from me; nevertheless not what I will, but what thou wilt." Mark 14:36. Here we have the one perfect example of submission to the Father's will. Here we see the complete surrender to the Father's will. No matter how thorny the oath, how weighty the burden, how unspeakable the cup, there was no murmuring, no turning back. Here is our perfect pattern, our holy example.

## II.

Let us look at one more of the Master's prayers. Gethsemane was over, the cross had come, hellish hate and murderous malice had brought Him to the tree. The jagged nails had torn His quivering flesh, and tortured nerves and straining sinews were supporting his painracked body; yet during this dark hour He prayed, "Father, forgive them, they know not what they do."

Here was the full illustration of what our Lord meant when he said: "But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them that despitefully use you, and persecute you." Matthew 5:44. He had taught his followers that they could not pray unless the spirit of forgiveness was in their hearts, and here was the perfect example of its meaning. Nothing



can go beyond it, and nothing can add to it, and no one can misunderstand it. Here is His own living, breathing example of what He meant when He said, "As ye stand praying, forgive".

### III.

Now let us note the spirit and manner in which he said prayer must be approached. "And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are; for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men". Matthew 6:5. This is in no sense meant to forbid public prayer. The emphasis is on the phrase, "to be seen of men". It means that prayer is not a sort of pietistic pose, but that it belongs to the deepest heart of the inner life. To go through the postures and forms of prayer, that men might see and applaud our devotion.

In this statement we have a call to simple sincerity, to holiness of purpose. Prayer is a thing so big, so meaningful, that it calls for every power of the human soul, and anything which does not do this is unworthy to be called prayer.

"But thou, 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. God deals with men face to face, and heart to heart or deals not at all. You cannot talk with the King and the crowd at the same time. The matters between you and God are too sacred and personal to be laid bare to the eyes of the multitude. We are going to tell God things when we pray, which we will not tell the crowd. Then God wants a chance to speak to us. He wants no jarring sounds, no chattering voices, when he would speak to a human soul.

Jesus did not mean that no one could pray unless in a closed and barred room, but he did mean that door of mind and heart which shuts out the world and us up with God must be closed. It is true, that when we pray, no one else but God and you, are there. Then we can say, "Alone with God, O blest retreat".



Conclusion: Jesus taught simplicity in prayer. All greatness is pure and unadorned. Great men and women are simple folk. Great books are those which deal with the elemental things of life. Great prayers are unaffected and direct. God knows all the circumstances, and does not need information nor exhortation. Child like prayers, red-hot earnestness and mighty heart longings, are the things for which God is looking. Prayer needs no neatly turned phrases or rounded periods. There is more persuasion in a sob, more eloquence in a groan, more argument in a penitent confession than in all the mechanical repetitions the world ever knew.