

"LIVING A PRAYERFUL LIFE"

TEXT: "But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door, and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly." (Matthew 6:6)

Albert Einstein tells of the time that he was asked by a woman to explain briefly his theory of relativity. Displaying humor and insight, he answered her question in the following fashion:

"I was once walking in the country on a hot day with a blind friend. I remarked that I would like to have a drink of milk. 'MILK' said my friend. 'DRINK I KNOW, BUT WHAT IS MILK'. I replied that it was a white liquid. 'LIQUID I KNOW' said the man, 'BUT WHAT IS WHITE. I told him that white was the color of the feathers of a swan. 'FEATHER I KNOW' was my friend's reply. 'BUT WHAT IS A SWAN?' I replied that a swan is a bird with a crooked neck. He said 'NECK I KNOW' 'BUT WHAT IS CROOKED?' At this I lost my patience. I took his arm and straightened it. 'THAT'S STRAIGHT' I said. Then I bent his elbow. 'THAT'S CROOKED.....' 'Ah' said my friend. 'NOW I KNOW WHAT YOU MEAN BY MILK.'"

So it is that many things in life are difficult to explain. One of these, I feel, is prayer. Most of us are blind in our efforts to understand it. Sometimes our wisest explanations are halting and awkward. And as a result, many people do not find their way to the secret chamber of prayer. And yet, strangely enough, we do not stop using milk simply because we cannot explain it in full detail. Therefore, it's a poor argument to say that we don't pray because we do not understand how it all works.

Jesus himself demonstrated this idea in his use of prayer. He made no effort to argue or analyze the subject. Yet prayer was for him a very real and vital experience. Consider, for instance, the section of the Sermon on the Mount in which he discusses prayer. He gives a few simple suggestions about prayer, and then gives the Lord's prayer as an example. In other words, Jesus took for granted the fact of prayer as a normal part of life's experience. He told his followers that prayer was not a matter of show as it had often been made to appear in those days. He pointed out that prayer was a sacred and secret fellowship between themselves and God. It was to be simple and sincere. There didn't need to be any noisy beatings on the doors of heaven since God already knew what we had need of.

"But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door, and pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly"

I think that his idea was not that an occasional and casual prayer would act like magic to make our dreams come true. He didn't look upon prayer as some kind of heavenly grab bag from which we grasp all the fineries of life. But Jesus did feel that in living a prayerful life, a person would find the deepest needs of life given fulfillment and satisfaction. Suppose then, we consider this morning, several aspects of the prayerful life.

A CUSHION AGAINST THE FRICTIONS OF EVERYDAY LIVING.....

In exploring the possibilities of the prayerful life, I think we would discover first of all that prayer serves

as a cushion against the disturbing frictions of everyday life. Here is one of our greatest needs: protection against the pressures of life. Fred Allen was once remarked:

"This insane modern civilization is too much for the moses model human body. Here we have an organism that was designed for Biblical times. Yet we expect it to cope with artificial lighting, executive board meetings, the din of automobile horns, and soap operas, carbon monoxide, cigar smoke and bubble gum. No wonder we've all got ulcers and high blood pressure."

It is true that the irritations of life can tense our nerves, and exhaust our bodies. They wear us out unless we build up some inner defense against them. A professor at the University of Montreal has given us some eye opening facts about nervous exhaustion. He took some rats, and kept them in a glass cage. He took good care of them except that he worried them constantly. He gave them food, but a dog stood outside the cage and growled and threatened them as they tried to eat. Loud noises were produced all around them. Heavy objects were dropped on the cage. In a short time, the rats were worn out, and all that had happened was that they had been worried and disturbed from the outside of the cage.

If rats can't take it, neither can human beings. It's so important that we develop some kind of a cushion against the frictions of life. Prayer does this very thing for us. Jesus told us to go into a secret place and close the door and shut the world out. He was saying that we need solitude if we are to cope effectively with the clamor and the business of life. We must have quiet periods of meditation when we are alone with ourselves and with God. We must take time out to give our spirits a chance to rest, a chance to unwind, a chance to live and grow.

Someone has suggested that:

"The best cure for optical strain is a complete change of focus. When the eye is exhausted from watching the antics of human beings, clap it to a telescope or microscope; the behavior of stars and beetles, though scarcely less baffling will come as a relief."

Our souls need this change of focus too. The prayer habit acts as a buffer between ourselves and our busy schedules. The person who is too busy to pray is too busy! A prayerful spirit helps to neutralize the shocks of the rough and rugged world in which we live. For it is in prayer that we surround ourselves with the infinite. We begin to live in the presence of eternal values. We regain the proper perspective. In prayer, a person stands before God and exposes his need. And this exposure does something startling. It gives us a calm poise which cannot be shaken. It gives us a spirit of peace through which nothing can pass.

IT HELPS TO MAKE SENSE OUT
OF THE WORLD IN WHICH WE LIVE

A second value of the prayerful life
is that it helps to make sense out of
the world in which we live. Here

again is another great need: a key moral and spiritual confusion.

I'm reminded of a story about a mother who wanted to buy a toy for her little boy. A clerk in the toy department of one of the modern stores in town, showed her a very complicated toy. After looking over the toy, the mother asked, "Isn't this a rather complicated toy for a little boy". And the clerk replied, "Why I suppose it is, but you see madam, it's what we call an educational toy. It's designed to help the child adjust to the world of today. Anyway he puts it together, it will always be wrong."

The story is a parable of life. We live in a confused and complicated world. Sometimes it seems that we can never do the right thing. Some times we wonder just what is the right thing. We desperately need something which will enable us to find ourselves in all of this confusion. We need something that will help us to cut through the confusion, thus enabling us to find a sense of purpose and direction. And once again may I emphasize that this is what prayer does. I suspect that many of you may be caught up in this confusion. Some of you may be desperate. You may not know just which way to turn. May I suggest that you try the way of prayer. Include it in your program of living.

Personally I feel that above all else, it is prayer that helps us to make sense out of life. It brings an attitude of patience, and purpose, and power into our living. A woman said to me recently:

"You know I've quit trying to fight life. I've come to the point where I've quit trying to anticipate everything that comes along. I'm letting God carry some of the load. I'm just trying to meet each day as it comes. And you know, I've been more relaxed and confident about everything."

That's the way it works. We need to let go and let God. As we do, I think we'll discover new strength and power flowing back into our lives. And it doesn't hurt to repeat over and over again some of the great Biblical assurances:

"Cast your burden upon the Lord, and He will sustain
Thee...."

"Peace I leave with you....My peace I give unto your."

"Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid."

Copy one or two of these great assurances down on a card, and carry them around with you. Refer to them during the day. I think you'll discover as many others have discovered that prayer brings peace and calmness in the midst of confusion. It helps to make sense out of living.

So far we have seen how prayer serves as a cushion against the frictions of life. We have seen how it helps to make sense out of living, and finally I would suggest that the prayerful life is a source of great personal vitality.

A SOURCE OF PERSONAL VITALITY.

Prayer for Jesus was not mere requirement
of religious ritual. Neither was it

And so it is that in a similar fashion as we come face to face with God, and wait upon him day after day in prayer, and see his face and feel

his hand clasp, that we shall go from his presence into the world with the same conviction - that there is no exploit, no obstacle, and no battle in life that is beyond our power.

For as Jesus said:

"Pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly....."

Of such is the prayerful life. It serves as a cushion against the friction of life. It helps to make sense out of the world in which we live, and it is a source of great personal vitality.

LET US PRAY:

Our Father, touch us with the flame of Thy spirit. Touch us with a consciousness of Thee. Touch us, that we may truly live. To thy guidance we commit ourselves. Do with us as Thou wilt. Amen

ASK, & IT SHALL BE GIVEN YOU —

SEEK, & YE SHALL FIND

KNOW, & IT SHALL BE OPENED TO YOU.