

February 28, 1914

THE KING'S HIGHWAY.

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PRAYING BECAUSE WE ARE BUSY.

One of the chief reasons why Christ prayed is the very reason why most men stop praying. He prayed because he was very busy. In the greatest stress of his ministry there was one thing of which Jesus made sure, and that was prayer. He could apparently better afford to go without a careful program of the day's work than to miss those moments of worship and supplication and communion which prepared him for any turn of events. The busy day, the certainty of controversy and friction, the exacting crowds, the sudden changes, all an exact picture of the active man's life to-day,—these were the things that determined the place that prayer should have in his life. And just such circumstances as these are what for most men determine that prayer is out of the question. The busy day is the tacit summons to prayer, yet we mistake it for an excuse from prayer. With Christ his own personal condition was the guarantee of successfully meeting the day's demands. He was up a great while before day. He often kept the crowds waiting an hour in the morning in order that no unreadiness in his spirit should delay him all day long in meeting their exactions and their needs. Other parts of the day's work might be left to chance; prayer was the part which he took care of at any cost.

What levity of mind we convict ourselves of when we say that we are too busy to pray! How we lower prayer by letting it down to a mere flavor and decorum, instead of treating it as the mightiest power we can use! In Christ's life it took its place among his hardest and costliest activities. Men wondered at his grace and his ease, but probably thought slightly of his habit of long and secret praying. But the main part of his work was done before they saw him. That for which they could give him no praise was the chief part of what he was doing for them. And in this is a hint of how the thoroughly ambitious nature, filled chiefly with aspiration for success, must always miss doing the greatest work because one's greatest work must be done where none can see it. Prayer is the final generosity toward one's work. There are many who will do every visible part of a great service, will serve their cause to the point of exhaustion in all its more public requirements, and yet never dare that higher sacrifice of sometimes staying away from it in order to render it a higher service. Prayer is the service for which one can never by any possibility receive thanks. It is the unseen toil. It is the surest test of one's real motive toward his work. It is almost the height of sacrifice and disinterestedness. And there are many who will do everything for their work except pray for it.

Let us put prayer, then, where Jesus puts it. From his time it begins to have a new history. In the light of his example the busy man is just the one who cannot afford to excuse himself from it. He does not know or understand his business until he knows it as something to which God desires to give his help. The busy life can pray better than the leisured and idle life. It may not be able to pray so long nor so fluently; there may be little of the beauty which would give one pride over his praying, but there will be a quality in it which is nearer to prayer's real purpose and essence than ever beauty and perfectness of phrase can be. In such a life prayer will come to its real function. It is in such a life that one

best discovers the real meaning of prayer. If we withhold from prayer the greatest field for its exercise, we shall never understand its true character. Yet how sincerely men wish that there might be some let-up from the tumult of their activities! Prayer is the greatest let-up, and if one uses it enough, it will make him content with a life of incessant activity. If men only knew where prayer belongs, they would pray with good grace. Since it is of itself the hardest work, there is something congenial between prayer and other hard work. It is all a vast mistake to dream of long leisure times and retreats in which we should make great headway in prayer, for in such circumstances the very things that make it most desirable have gone. Prayer comes to its real and true place when we have learned that it is to be mixed with our business and classed among our most earnest and arduous activities. Every other way it becomes a mere "luxury of devotion."

After years of experience, we begin to realize the amount of harm that can be done to the whole day's work by the first half-hour of the day. Not only a man's own spirit, but his entire household as well and all his work for that day, may be thrown into a discord whose echoes will not die out till nightfall. And all this often enough for want of a little prayer, or much prayer, as the case may be. We walk with willing blindness into one failure after another. The day goes wrong, relationships are strained, and still we think of prayer as some far-off, exceptional exercise for monks and saints and quiet, protected lives, instead of the one and only thing for our situation. Or even when we are engaged in good honest service, direct Christian service it may be, there will come over us at times a sense of faintness, desertion, and indifference, for which we know not how to account. It surprises us. We thought the very character of our work, the fact that it was undertaken for God, was almost a substitute for prayer. And then, if the the spirit knows what is the matter, just stops a moment and turns to this true business of inviting divine help, it seems as if the work were all brightened and charged with significance and interest again. We wonder that we so missed the point of what we were doing when we find that a moment of communion gives it back to us bathed in heaven. And we have all done this enough to know how real an experience it is, yet somehow we lack continuity in it, and keep trying to manage life some other way. We are not yet sufficiently true believers in prayer to know how to manage prayer as a constant and reliable force in life.

It is better to go to our work a little later if communion with God is what delays us, as it did Christ, than to go to it an hour earlier fitted out with ever so careful and orderly a programme developed out of nothing but our unaided wisdom, however high and good that may be. It is strange that when we lay out for ourselves new courses of activity, we plan to work hard and continuously at a score of different points that need our attention, while prayer seems too spiritual a thing to be classed among our activities. Therefore we toil much and bring in little. We work under strain and tension far greater than we need. We prolong to weariness what might have been done very briefly. We try to do more and ever more, as if that would bring success, and forget that it is God that giveth the increase.

Prayer should be associated with hard work because it is hard work itself. Not in our most silent and retired moments does it find its finest field, but in the stress and strain of life. If prayer is difficult, it is what robs other things of their difficulty. Though men give up worship because in all sincerity believing that their work demands this, they create a steady and mysterious deficit in the work itself. It is hard to pray. They do not mistake its nature. It is no blissful and ethereal matter. But the one who is nerved and alert for other strenuous things is, if he did but know it, in the best of all conditions for effective prayer.—*Sunday School Times*.

SPARKS FROM THE ANVIL.

REV. A. P. GOUTHEY, B. D.

Baptized rationalism is the worst kind of infidelity.

Lightning that kills is always noisy.

Adversity makes us acquainted with ourselves.

Young man, a doll-baby wife is expensive plunder.

Preaching that does not draw men to God for purity is a libel on the Gospel.

When the preacher is prayerless, his message will lose its point and edge.

Wanted, ten million godly, prayerful, sensible, old-fashioned mothers!

The things which we permit to lodge in our hearts will mould us into their own image.

Every man with sin in his life is a fugitive from justice. The bloodhounds of damnation are trailing him!

When laziness hath conceived, it bringeth forth regret. Young man, bestir thyself!

He is a hero indeed who has gained the victory over moral cowardice.

A calm, dignified, religious self-possession is the outline of every gentleman.

Men will sing or sigh, worship or wail, both here and hereafter, according to the choices they make.

The instruction of certain college professors will generate infidelity and skepticism enough to baffle pulpit and press for the next quarter of a century.

A prayerless home, without parental authority is a fertile field where grows the nation's crop of criminals.

When mother spends her time at balls and parties and has more pride than religion, the children are the most destitute orphans on earth!

The slander brigade uses long-range guns, and their deafening reports are frequently heard through several generations.

GYPSY SMITH AND WESLEY.

Gypsy Smith says: "Where so many people blunder is in looking to mere human agency. We still have the notion that if this man or that could only come we should have a revival—as if that man carried the revival in his portmanteau, or his pocket-book, or the covers of his Bible. But it can come through the most ordinary channel, and in the most out-of-the-way place, if we will only meet together and put God's promise to the test. You don't get a new kind of spring, or every morning a new kind of sun. When the sun breaks through the clouds, after no matter how long or short an interval, it is the same sun. And yet every time it is new enough and joyous enough, isn't it? I want the kind of revival that John Wesley saw."