

The Sign of Prayer

by Samuel Chadwick

Prayer is the symbol and proof of grace, and it is the key to spiritual co-operation with God.

Scripture: Psalm 34:17, Isaiah 55:9, Matthew 7:11, Luke 11:9, Philippians 4:6, James 5:17

Topics: "Prayer", "Sonship"

Description

Samuel Chadwick emphasizes the inseparable connection between God and prayer, highlighting how belief in God and prayer are fundamental and intuitive to all religions. The Old Testament is rich in teachings about prayer, with commands, inducements, and examples of prevailing prayer. Chadwick delves into the essence of prayer, focusing on the laws of prayer laid down by Jesus and the significance of prayer as a sign of sonship. He explores God's perspective on prayer, showcasing how prayer is a symbol of grace and the privilege of sons, serving as a test of sonship.

Transcript

All religions pray. God and prayer are inseparable. Belief in God and belief in prayer are elemental and intuitive. The ideas may be crude and cruel in primitive and pagan peoples, but they belong to the universal intuitions of the human race. The teaching of the Old Testament is full of the subject of prayer. Everywhere there are commands and inducements to pray, and the great stories of deliverance and victory, experience and vision, are all examples of prevailing prayer. All the crises in the life of our Lord were linked with special seasons of prayer, and His teaching set forth wonderful assurances to those who pray. He laid down the laws of prayer, though He never sought to explain its mystery. Prayer was not a problem to Him. The two parables He spoke about prayer are not very acceptable to those who pray. There is something alien to the spirit of prayer in likening God to a heartless judge or a churlish friend. God is neither. The parables were not spoken as representative of God, but to illustrate the reward of importunity. The basis of prayer is sonship. Prayer is possible and reasonable because it is filial. It is natural for a child to ask of its father, and it is reasonable for the father to listen to the request of his child. "If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?" (Matthew 7: 11; I Thessalonians 2:11). There are many problems about prayer, but they lie outside the fact and experience of prayer, and apart from praying there is no solution of them. Prayer is a fact of experience, and through all the ages the testimony of those who prayed has been that God hears and answers the prayers of His children.

What God Thinks About Prayer

The thoughts of God are not as man's thoughts, neither are His ways man's ways. "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts" (Isaiah 55: 9). God has made known His thoughts and His ways, in the revelation of His Word and in the Person of His Son. The medium of the revelation is experience, and the occasion is in the events of life in individuals and in history. God has never put his thoughts into a thesis of philosophy or metaphysics. He has interpreted in life and set forth His way in precepts, principles, and example. There is one incident which tells us what God thinks of prayer. His mind concerning prayer is seen in every command to pray, in every law of prayer, in every promise concerning prayer, and in every example of answered prayer. Every part is part of the whole, but every subject of Scripture has its final and complete expression, and in the conversion of Saul of Tarsus there is a unique revelation of the mind of God concerning prayer. There are three persons in that incident of prayer. There are the man who prayed, the God who heard, and the man through whom the answer came. God is central. It is to Him prayer is made, through Him prayer is interpreted, and by Him prayer is answered.

God speaks of prayer in terms of wonder: "Behold, he prayeth." The language is that of humanity, but it is the only speech man knows, and however inadequate it may be, it stands for corresponding reality in God. Can God wonder? Can there be in Him elements of surprise and amazement? Can it be that there are things that to God are wonderful? That is how God speaks, and to Him there is nothing more gloriously wonderful than prayer. It would seem as if the biggest thing in God's universe is a man who prays. There is only one thing more amazing, and that is, that man, knowing this, should not pray. Behold! In that word there is wonder, rapture, exultation. In the estimate of God prayer is more wonderful than all the wonders of the heavens, more glorious than all the mysteries of the earth, more mighty than all the forces of creation.

God interprets prayer as a sign of all that happened to Saul of Tarsus on the Damascus road. The event is variously expressed. To the church of Judaea it was a conversion that turned their archpersecutor into a preacher. This is how Paul the apostle states it in writing to the Galatians: "Afterwards I came into the regions of Syria and Cilicia; and was unknown by face unto the churches of Judaea which were in Christ; but they had heard only, that he which persecuted us in times past now preacheth the faith which once he destroyed. And they glorified God in me." That is a conversion that was the result of an experience. What was the experience? Paul says that in the experience it pleased God to reveal His Son in him. That is what the Damascus road experience meant to him. When God speaks of it, He sums it all up in the words, "Behold, he prayeth."

That is what it meant to God, and that is what it always means to Him. Prayer is the symbol and proof and gauge of grace. All that happens in the converting work of grace whereby we receive the adoption of sons is that, being sons, we begin to pray. Saul of Tarsus had been a praying man all his life, but it was not until then that he began to pray as God interprets prayer. The children's hymn is equally applicable to grown-up people:

I often say my prayers,

But do I ever pray?

Prayer is the privilege of sons, and the test of sonship. It would seem as if God divided all men into the simple classification of those who pray and those who do not. It is a very simple test, but it is decisive, and divisive.

The Way God Answers Prayer

God answers joyously. There is a ring of exultation in the words He speaks to Ananias, like the joyous ring of our Lord's parable of the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost son. Rejoice with me! "Behold, he prayeth!" There is joy in the heart of God the Father when His lost children begin to pray. He answers like the God He is. Ananias may parley with God, but God never parleys with man. The answering hand of God waits for the lifted hand of man, and the heart that answers always transcends the heart that cries.

The answer to Saul of Tarsus was twofold: He gave a vision and sent a messenger -- a vision, and a man, each corresponding to the other. That is God's way: first an assurance, and then the confirmation. That is the prayer of faith that never fails. God's servants are partners with Him in the ministry of prayer. That is the mystery of spiritual co-operation. The Lord goes before the man He sends. Saul was prepared and waiting for the man he had already seen in a vision of God. Ananias found Saul prepared and waiting.

God gave to Ananias the sign of prayer as the proof of grace. It was His own sign, and it is the sign He still gives. Is there any proof that a man is a man of God like the fact that he is a man of prayer? Of Elijah it is said that he "prayed in his prayer" (James 5: 17, A.V., margin). Of some men it is said that they live in an atmosphere of devotion; but it is one thing to live in an atmosphere of prayer and another to "pray in our praying." Finney went to a weekly prayer meeting, where they prayed much and got no answers. Muller prayed and answers came, and that is why all men believed him to be a man of God. When I was a very small boy, not more than six or seven years of age, I was sent on an errand to the house of a neighbor named Davenport; it was about nine o'clock in the morning. I knocked, lifted the latch, and stepped inside. On the hearth, kneeling at a chair on which was an open Bible, was Mrs. Davenport, praying. She was unaware of my presence. I stood in silent awe for a moment, and then quietly stepped out and closed the door. It is more than sixty years since that morning, but from then till now I have known that Mrs. Davenport was a saint of God, because she prayed. It is God's infallible sign, and it is the only sign that even the world accepts as an infallible proof.

Prayer made all the difference to Saul of Tarsus, and it always makes all the difference. It brought a new assurance of God, a new confirmation of faith, a new fellowship of the people of God, a new experience of healing, a new vocation, a new inheritance, a new power. Prayer changes things; Prayer makes all things possible, for it links the praying soul to the omnipotence of God. Do we pray? Do we pray in our praying? Does God put His seal on our prayers?

Lord, teach us to pray!

Prayer is the contrite sinner's voice

Returning from his ways,

While angels in their songs rejoice,

And cry, "Behold he prays."

Prayer is the Christian's vital breath,

The Christian's native air,

His watchword at the gates of death;

He enters heaven with prayer.

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