

Before Daybreak with Christ

by C.H. Spurgeon

C.H. Spurgeon emphasizes the vital importance of secret, fervent prayer as the foundation for Christ's ministry and encourages believers to follow Jesus' example of early morning communion with the Father to sustain their spiritual work.

Scripture: Mark 1:35-39, Matthew 6:6, Psalm 5:3

Topics: "Prayer", "Christ's Ministry", "Spiritual Discipline"

Description

In this devotional sermon, C.H. Spurgeon explores the early morning prayer of Jesus as recorded in Mark 1:35-39, highlighting the critical role of private prayer in sustaining Christ's ministry. Spurgeon challenges believers to move beyond superficial religious practices and embrace a lifestyle of continual, fervent prayer. Through vivid illustrations and biblical insights, he encourages Christians to follow the Savior's example of seeking God in solitude to empower their daily spiritual walk and ministry.

Transcript

BY C. H. SPURGEON,

"And in the morning, rising up a great while before day, He went out, and departed into a solitary place, and there prayed. And Simon and they that were with Him followed after Him. And when they had found Him, they said unto Him, All men seek for You. And He said unto them, Let us go into the next towns, that I may preach there also for therefore came I forth. And He preached in their synagogues throughout all Galilee, and cast out devils." Mark 1:35-39.

A WONDERFUL day was closed and crowned by a wonderful evening. Capernaum had been exalted to Heaven that day, for deeds worthy of Heaven had been worked in her. Within the synagogue the power and authority of the new Teacher had been seen, but at the close of the Sabbath, when the people felt more free to lay their sick before Him, His Divine Majesty was glorified before all in the open streets of the little town. Galilee had never before seen such a day of preaching, or such an eventide of healing. "At even, when the sun did set, they brought unto Him all that were diseased, and them that were possessed with devils. And all the city was gathered together at the door. And He healed many that were sick of different diseases, and cast out many devils."

Surely this day was worthy to take a front rank among "the days of the Son of Man." A very wonderful evening! Did not they think it so who had long grown to their beds, but suddenly found themselves

walking, leaping and praising God? Those must have thought it so who beheld their pining relatives restored to health and vigor. Even devils must have felt it to be so, as they fled pell-mell into the deep! Assuredly the people of the city must have been greatly excited— on the housetops, in the market and in every lane and alley the one theme of talk must have been the new Rabbi—His strange teaching and His unrivalled miracles!

After our Lord's sermon in the synagogue He held an inquiry-meeting in the street—He had no other assembly room. There He led them to look to Him and obtain healing; and as this went on, crowds of persons were present confessing what the Lord had done for them. One might be content to die after being present at such a scene! After that evening was over and men went home, they said, "It was a very extraordinary occasion. What new teaching is this? What power is this? We have never seen its like." It was a day from which to date an era—Heaven and earth and Hell were all affected by it! That pure teaching opening the mystery of the Kingdom; that healing energy setting forth the power of the redeeming King! No wonder that all tongues were fluent and all lips eloquent, when there was so Divine a subject to enlarge upon!

Children and unlettered peasants could repeat the chronicle of that day of Grace. They needed not to expatiate, much less to exaggerate, for, in truth, it was a heavenly day and grew even brighter as the shadows fell. Those evening hours were as the hands of Mercy, all bedecked with rings and jewels of heavenly charity—Love was then in her bridal attire and miracles were the bespangled ornaments of her beauty! Do you not think that the wonderful evening was followed by an equally wonderful morning? That Sunday morning, as we now call the first day of the week, was it not equally notable? Remember the grand excitement of the day and its long eventide—and then observe the hallowed devotion of the coming dawn.

The Preacher and Miracle-Worker had been worked up to a high pitch and we should not have wondered had He needed lengthened rest. But instead thereof we read, "Rising up a great while before day, He went out, and departed into a solitary place, and there prayed." Jesus has taken such necessary sleep as He desired and He wakes. It is still dark and all the inhabitants of the house are asleep. He very quietly and noiselessly steals out of the chamber and finds His way into the street. And you see Him go along, alone, till He has left the narrow roadway and reached the open fields. The gleaming of the morning has hardly come—the dawn is scarcely gray. It is, "a great while before daylight," and the darkness hangs all around with its friendly veil.

But Jesus knows His way—He had been down those streets healing the sick—and out in the open He is at home, for He is acquainted with solitude and the lines upon the face of sleeping Nature are familiar to Him. He turns to the most solitary hillside. Yonder is a hollow. He who enters that recess is quite out of sight. Jesus has passed into that hidden place and there, in the darkness, He kneels. He cries! He supplicates! He speaks with God! He prays! Is this His rest after a toilsome day? Is this His preparation for coming labor? It is even so! That early morning of prayer explains the evening of power. As Man, He had not possessed that wonderful power over human minds if He had not perpetually communed with God. And now that His day's work is done and the marvelous evening is over, all is not ended—a life-work still remains before Him and, therefore, He must pray.

He feels a necessity that there should be more marvelous evenings—that there should be further displays of power— and therefore the Great Worker draws near, again, to the Source of strength, that He may, afresh, gird up His loins for that which lies before Him. Dear Friends, there is always a connection, even if

we do not see it, between that great crowd on Sunday, and the pleadings of the saints—a most intimate connection between the flocking converts of the ministry and those secret prayers which follow and precede it. There is such a connection that the two cannot be parted! God will not send great blessings in the way of open conversion if secret prayer is neglected. Let the preacher or the Church fail to pray and God will refuse to bless!

Yes, and after conversions, unless there is, again, special prayer presented by the Lord's servants, much that looked like blessing may turn out to have been but the semblance of it and future blessings may be withheld. If I could impress my heart on every syllable, and baptize every word with my tears, I could not too earnestly entreat you to be, above all things, earnest in prayer! I delight to think of our Lord as praying before He did a great thing—it was His custom so to do! Perhaps the early morning prayer of our text preceded the Sermon on the Mount. I am not quite sure about that fact, though certain of the writers of Harmonies are assured of it. But I am quite certain that this special supplication followed an evening of miracles and it seems to teach us that when God is with us, we should have even more anxiety than ever to keep Him with us.

When the blessing has really come and souls are being saved on all sides, then are we to redouble our cries to Heaven, that the merciful Presence may be retained and enjoyed to a still higher degree! Fresh from the wonderful successes of that miraculous night, the Christ of God goes, on the Sunday morning, to open the gates of the day with the uplifted hands of His prayers! Prayer should be our companion at all times. Pray when you are pining for a blessing. Pray when you have newly obtained a blessing.

Now, we shall look at four points of our Savior's Character as we see them in these few verses. Let us hear the melody of four of those golden bells which adorn the garments of our great High Priest. First, we are caused to observe—Prayer by Him intensely esteemed. Secondly, popularity weighed in the balances and lightly valued. Thirdly, practical duty followed out, for when they said, "All men seek for You," He said to them, "Let us go into the next towns that I may preach there also for therefore came I forth." The fourth point is well worthy of attention. Here it is—preaching always to the forefront with Him. Whatever He does not do, He does preach and, though He works miracles such as casting out devils, He evidently regards all bodily cures as subsidiary to His main work.

"Let us go into the next towns, that I may preach there also for therefore came I forth." We shall put the four things together and see how the power and the preaching hang upon one another, and how the despising of popularity is fitly conjoined with the intense purpose to carry out His life-work.

I. First, then, let us think a little about our Lord in His private communion with the Father—PRAYER—HOW INTENSELY IT WAS ESTEEMED BY HIM! He rose up early that weekday morning and retired to a solitary place to pray, to teach us not to keep our religiousness for Sabbath days, or retain our prayerfulness for one day of the week. Many Jews in Christ's day said, "We have been to synagogue." And when going to synagogue was over, their religion was over, too. At this day we are surrounded by persons whose godliness is circumscribed within the four walls of their synagogue, their church, their tabernacle, or whatever else they like to call it. Religion means to many the observance of certain ceremonies at stated times. They put on different clothes and tread another floor—and then their religion begins.

Do they put on different garments on the Sabbath because they are different men, or because they wish to be thought so? There is such a thing as a Sunday religion and he that has it will be lost. The religion which

only lives in our religious assemblies—how can it serve our turn? Shall we be at the meeting all the week? Shall we die in the place of worship? In all probability we shall die in our beds at home and, therefore, we need a household godliness. Prayer on Sunday is well enough, but far better is the supplication which continually waits upon God. Our Sunday prayer should abound, but the weekdays equally need prayer and should be saturated with it. Grace is for streets and shops as well as for sanctuaries.

It is well when God rules our thoughts as much in the shop as in the Prayer Meeting—when we are as much under the governance of our Lord Jesus Christ when we are busy in the family as when we are sitting in the Church of God. Oh, let us see to this! Our Master gives us a good example, here. It was not upon the Sabbath morning that He woke so early—it was on the first day of the week, not yet rendered sacred by His Resurrection, that our Lord left His bed and wended His way through the shadows to find a place for fellowship with the Father!

You observe that in His prayer He desired very much to be alone. He was anxious that His prayer might not be seen of men. Woe unto that man whose devotion is observed by everybody and who never offers a secret supplication! Secret prayer is the secret of prayer, the soul of prayer, the seal of prayer, the strength of prayer! If you do not pray alone, you do not pray at all. I care not whether you pray in the street, or in the church, or in the barracks, or in the cathedral—but your heart must speak with God in secret—or you have not prayed. "You, when you pray, enter into your closet and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father which is in secret; and your Father which sees in secret shall reward you openly!" The less prayer is observed on earth, the more it is observed in Heaven. That which is carefully concealed from men is seen of the Father.

I suppose, too, that our Lord loved to be alone that He might pray aloud. It is not necessary to pray with the voice—it is sometimes highly undesirable that you should pray aloud—but yet, as a rule, you will find it greatly advantageous to yourself to use your voice as well as your mind in prayer. I speak what I have often proved. I am accustomed to pray without uttering a single sound, but I find a relief and a stimulus in occasionally "crying aloud." In a lone spot where I shall not be heard, I find it an intense delight to pour out my heart aloud, using words and exclamations whereby the spirit expresses itself with freedom and force. I think that the Savior, who was intensely Human, felt much rest in the unrestrained pouring out of His heart and soul before His Father. He was supremely Human as He was certainly Divine— and I do not doubt that it was a comfort to Him to awaken the hills with His praises, startle the glens with His groans and put a tongue into every bush and tuft by His strong crying and tears.

All Nature was akin to Him and the desert places were meet chambers for His great soul, wherein as in His own house "the Holy Child Jesus" might speak with the Father face to face. I commend to you, who would attain to high communion with the Eternal that, as often as you can, you get so far afield as to be able to pray aloud and use the unrestrained voice in prayer. "My voice shall You hear in the morning, O God." David continually speaks of crying with his voice unto God. It is not essential, but it is often helpful. Our blessed Master desired to get alone because there He would feel free to express Himself—to tell out His very secrets to the great Father. His prayers in solitude! They must have been marvelous communications! How familiar with God and yet how lowly! How simple, yet how spiritual! How full! How deep! How intense!

Perhaps you have desired that they had been recorded, but you need not that I remind you that the world, itself, could not have contained all the books that might have been written! Be grateful for those that are written and believe that Infinite Wisdom is as much displayed in the concealment of a part of our Lord's life

as in the publication of the rest of it. Perhaps those prayers of His were such as we might not hear. Every saint pleads, at times, in forms of passionate petition which nobody else should hear but God. When we are quite alone, we may dare to say things which might seem too venturesome for any other. I am glad that we have not many of Luther's prayers, for I conceive that the great bold German often said things to his God which a common Christian might not dare to say. That which was perfectly reverent in him might have savored of presumption if you or I had ventured upon it! That which the Lord accepted from Luther, whom He had placed in so singular a position and constituted in so remarkable a way for his work, might have been offensive if spoken by another.

The Master's prayers were a free, outspoken talk with the Most High. His heart was open to the Lord as yonder river to the shining of the moon above it. Certainly, our Lord Jesus Christ rose up early and went alone in the dark to pray,

because He loved to put prayer first of all. He would go nowhere till He had prayed. He would attempt nothing till He had prayed. He would not cast out a devil, He would not preach a sermon, He would work no cure, however necessary, however profitable, until, first of all, He had drawn near to God. Take good heed unto yourselves, my Brothers and Sisters, that you follow the same rule. Look no man in the face till you have seen the face of God. Speak with none till you have spoken with the Most High. Go not to your labor with your loins ungirded with the girdle of devotion, lest you fail therein. Take not to running till you have, in prayer, laid aside every weight, lest you lose the race.

We cannot, we must not, think of entering upon a day, or upon an enterprise, without first saying, "Bring here the ephod: let us ask counsel of the Lord!" We can do nothing without our God! Let us attempt nothing without Him. So the Savior rises a great while before day and gets alone with His God, that for Him prayer might perfume the morning dew and sweeten the first breath of the dawn. There was about the Savior an intense desire to meet with God—to commune with the Father. Herein there is a living likeness between His prayers and ours, but yet His devotions must have been very different from ours because He had no sin to confess as we have. A large part of our communion with God must lie in our confession of sin, in our expression of personal weakness and in our pleading the righteousness of our Divine Redeemer.

But this Blessed One had no sins to admit before the Most High and no weakness to lament, for in Him was neither sin nor tendency to sin. I can conceive that much of His devotion was shown in converse with the Father, when His blessed mind, forever in agreement with the mind of God, spoke to God and God revealed Himself to Him. Intimate communion must have been the main ingredient of the Savior's prayers. Some of the sweetest devotion Christians ever enjoy does not lie in asking anything of the Father, but in the enjoyment of the Father, Himself. Two friends in closest communion do not spend their time in mutual explanations and setting things straight—nor even in asking favors of each other—they proceed to heart-to-heart conversation, known only to those who have enjoyed the like.

We are always in need and, therefore, our daily devotion must consist largely of petitions, but yet we are, by Divine Grace, the children of the Lord, and the child says many things to his Father beside that which takes the form of a request. Have we not, with joyful reverence, told our heavenly Father how we love Him? How we long to be more like He? How we desire to serve Him? That is how we talk—alone with God—our heart is to the heart of God as the echo to the living voice which calls to it. The Savior would tell the Father of all His love to Him, how He desired nothing but the salvation of those whom the Father gave Him, how He devoted Himself to glorify His name in them, for they were His and He was Surety for them.

All that the Divine Jesus could and would say to His Father, we may not endeavor to imagine. We could not be permitted to stand by and hear those solitary prayers, but they must have been something unique, worthy of the Sacred Persons who there held solemn dialogue. Yes, the great heart of Jesus swam in supplication as in its element—and in proportion as we become like He, we shall be of His mind as to private prayer.

One said to me the other day what I have sometimes read, but I was especially shocked to hear it. She said, "I am so conformed to the mind and will of God that I do not need to pray." I answered in sad surprise, "I pray God will open your eyes to see the delusion under which you are laboring, for the Holy Lord Jesus Christ abounded in prayer, notwithstanding His absolute perfection." That kind of perfection which leads a man to think that he does not need to pray is damnable! I will use no calmer word. I believe that the "doctrine of sinless perfection," as it is frequently taught in these fanatical days, will be the ruin of many a soul that holds it! Could you cease to pray, you would cease to live spiritually. It is the very breath of your nostrils if you are a child of God!

As to your being so perfect as to need no more prayer and watchfulness, you lie to your own soul, as surely as you live! Instead of believing in your perfection, I pray God deliver you from so terrible a delusion. If you were perfect, you would still need to pray. No, you would pray more than ever and your life, like that of Jesus, would be steeped and saturated in prayer! Our Lord, because He was perfect, longed perpetually to draw near unto God. "Oh," says one, "I live in the spirit of prayer and, therefore, I do not need times and seasons for prayer." And do you think that Christ did not live in the spirit of prayer? Yet He must have His special time and place to pray! Do not fall under the injurious notion that because your spirit cries to God in prayer all day long, therefore there must not be some season for more immediately coming into God's Presence! If you do thus imagine, I am afraid that it will prove a snare to your feet. The Lord Jesus Christ, who knew better than you, that the main thing is the spirit of prayer rather than the act of prayer, yet, Himself retired into desert places to maintain the act and exercise of prayer!

Be spiritual. Be baptized into the spirit of prayer, but do not be deceived by the enemy who can spirit a duty away while we dream that we only spiritualize it! We had better preserve the very bones of prayer, the posture, time and place, rather than let it all ooze away into an impalpable mental condition. God keep us prayerful! He will do so if He makes us like His dear Son. Further, I want you to notice concerning our Lord's prayer that there can be no doubt that in His prayer He prayed for Himself. Much of His prayer belonged to Himself, and to Himself, only. He was, we know, in one great instance, "heard in that He feared," and He was heard in many other things known only to Himself. But our Lord also much abounded in prayer for His disciples—He took their cases, one by one, and pleaded with the Father for them.

Remember how He prayed for Peter—supplicating for him before he came into danger? He said. "Simon, Simon, Satan has desired to have you." The enemy had only reached as far as the desire, but the Good Shepherd was quicker than the wolf and had already interceded—"but I have prayed for you." Christ had outstripped the devil! He had already prayed before the temptation came. And here on earth, as a father in the midst of his children, He took care that none of them should be in danger through the lack of His loving intercession! And do you not think that He was praying, too, at that time, for the sinners that were round about Him?

It is His practice in Heaven to make intercession for the transgressors—and I am sure that He did it here below. As He looked into those faces in the streets of Capernaum, He read the stories of their sin and these came back to His memory amid those lone hills. He knew more about men than we do, for He could

search their thoughts. He knew how foolish they were and how far they had gone aside from God—and so, in the silence of the desert, He prayed with wide knowledge and profound sympathy—and He spoke with the Most High in eager pleas for those whose sins He measured and whose doom He foresaw.

To do His people and the world the grandest service in His power till He should lay down His life, our Lord stole away amid the heathery hills or the stony heaps of the shores of Galilee. Dear Friends, take care that you pray. Need I say it? Take care that you use all aids to prayer, such as being alone and rising early to pray. If your Lord needed prayer, you require it much more. Take care that you pray much in the time of your success. Do not think that because of the wonders God did for you last night, you are not to pray in the morning, but set double guard over your spirit in the moment of rejoicing lest you be carried away by pride. "Oh," you say, "but my prayers are so often disturbed!" I know! The devil is sure to send somebody to knock at the door when you want to be quiet in prayer. Your Lord can sympathize with you in that, for Simon and they that were with Him followed after Him and disturbed the solitude which He had sought with so much care.

Simon was always to the front and sometimes mischievously so. And here He is, leading the way in disturbing His Master! Do not wonder if Satan finds a Simon to worry you. But as your Lord knows what it is to be disturbed, He can help you to bear up under disturbances. He can cheer you when these interruptions distress you and He can aid you to renew your pleadings when the chain of your prayer has been broken. I regret that I can say no more on this point, because my time has fled.

II. Only just a word or two, in the second place, upon POPULARITY WEIGHED by the Savior. The disturbance that came to the Savior's prayers arose out of the desire of His disciples to tell Him that everybody was after Him and, according to Luke's account in his fourth chapter, the people of the town were close on the heels of the disciples, to pray him not to go away, but to stop and be their Prophet and heal their sick. Our Lord's popularity was of the best kind—it had not been gained by any arts or tricks, nor by pandering to their pride, nor by yielding to their prejudices. He had preached nothing but the Truth of God and He had worked no miracle among them for the mere sake of display, but only for their good.

Yet He did not care for the best of popularity. He did not think it worth the having for its own sake and, therefore, He shunned it to the utmost. His popularity could be used and He did use it—for when the people came together He preached the Gospel to them—but applause had no charms for Him. He knew what poor stuff it is—of what gas it is made. He knew how uncertain it is—how, like the wind, it will veer round in no time. He knew that it might prove dangerous and it did, for they sought, by-and-by, to make Him a king. Even His disciples would, if they could, have turned Him from His spiritual purpose. Poor hearts! They wished to see Him honored, but they did not know that honor from men would have brought no honor to Him. When they told our Lord, "All men seek you," He did not take notice of it, but proposed to go elsewhere and preach the Gospel.

Oh, dear Friends, if ever you succeed in Christ's Kingdom, bless God for your spiritual success, but do not think much of the approbation which follows upon it. Pass it over in silence, as though you heard it not. What is human approbation? What can it do for you? "When we have done all, we are unprofitable servants." If we have done anything good, no credit is due to us, but only to the Lord, whose Grace has made us to be His workmanship! If the Lord Jesus Christ, who preached by His own authority and power, and who worked miracles by His own might, yet fled away as much as He could from the applause of men, much more let each one of us do so! Oh, to walk before the Lord and be blind and deaf to all the censures and the plaudits of the poor creatures around us!

I have seen men whom God has greatly blessed, who have been highly honored by their Brethren, and yet they have been cast down and have, therefore, been made to lie low in their own esteem. On the other hand, I have observed others whose usefulness in the Church has not appeared to anybody but themselves, and yet they have been so tall that they almost needed St. Paul's Cathedral to stand upright! Their self-esteem has been 10 times taller than the esteem of their wiser brethren! Let us prefer to be found among the useful and lowly, rather than among the self-conceited and useless! God will not greatly bless us if we grow great.

We may soon become too big to be used to win souls. I notice that soul-winning is generally accomplished by humble instruments. It is a delicate task and the Lord, who does it, will not use those who are great, strong and mighty in their own esteem. When the Lord finds His servants lowly, like the Lord Jesus Christ, then they shall be used! The longer I live, the more do I see that, as a rule, pride is the death of all true spiritual usefulness. As you love God and would desire to honor Him by a useful life, put far from you the temptation to sip of the intoxicating cup of human honor! Drafts of worldly glory are not for the priests of the Most High! Though not in the Savior's case, yet in ours, there is a close connection between our prayers and our being kept humble before the Lord.

It is remarkable how kindly our neighbors watch over our vineyards in that respect. They are all in a fraternal flutter for fear we should grow vain—it is very good of them, but we do not wish them to rob themselves for our advantage! "Ah, Sir," said a good lady to me one day, "I pray for you every day that you may be kept humble!" She was a wonderfully fine-looking woman and splendidly dressed and, therefore, I replied, "Thank you much; but you remind me of a failure in my duty. I have never prayed for you that you might be kept humble." "Dear Sir," she cried, "there is no need for such prayers, for I am not tempted to be proud."

How proud she was to have attained to such a delusion! When anybody says, "I am not tempted to be proud," shrewd common sense suggests that it is time to wake up, lest the enemy get a fatal advantage over the vain spirit! When there is much prayer—abundant prayer and drawing near to God—then the greatest success can be borne without risk. Prayer ballasts the ship and so, when God fills the sails with a prosperous wind, the vessel is not overborne.

III. Notice, thirdly, how our Lord put aside all the dangers of popularity by setting before us PRACTICAL DUTY FOLLOWED OUT. They said, "All men seek You." I think that most of us would have replied, "Well, then, let us go down and talk to them." But Jesus cries, "Let us go into the next towns, that I may preach there also." Instead of desiring honor, He shuns it! Yes, He leaves no space for it, for He occupies each hour with a new labor. He will break up new soil—old harvests only serve to fill the basket for new seed-sowings. He will go to encounter other trials as soon as the first are overcome. When He enters a place for the first time, there is opposition, and Jesus is eager to face it. For Him there remained no love of ease, no resting upon laurels already won.

His nobly impatient spirit cries, "We have done something for Capernaum; let us seek fresh fields and new pastures." He will also enlist assistance and awaken others to share in the Holy War. How condescendingly the Master puts it! He says, "Let us go." "O Divine Master, all men seek You." And the answer is, "Let us go into the next towns." He lifted His poor disciples into the us with Himself! Because they are, through the rest of their lives, to be associated with Him in His holy work, He takes care that in the first flush of His success they shall be brought to the front in connection with Himself. They will feel how unworthy they are to be in such high fellowship—they will admire His condescension in putting them

there—and they will be the more ready to go on with Him, taking their full part in evangelizing the other villages and towns.

Our Lord is thinking of the whole business! It is all before His mind's eye what He is to do personally and what He is to do through each one of them. The practical duty of doing His part of the work and using them for their part of the work is strong upon Him. With a quick eye He sees not what has been done, but what is to be done! Not what God has

given, but what God will still give in answer to the prayers which He has prayed—and He expects that it will be so large that He will need all His followers to help Him in the process of gathering it in! So He says, "Let us go into the next towns." He does not say, "Let us rest and be thankful," but He obeys the secret instinct which drives Him forward to be doing more and more of good to the sons of men. He feels within His soul that imperial must which, every now and then, crops up in His story as it is told by the Evangelists.

He is under a necessity to do the Father's will in blessing the sons of men. All else is as nothing to Him—"Therefore came I forth," He says. The errand for which He came forth evidently presses Him, constrains Him, impels Him! He must go forward till all His baptism is accomplished! His slow of understanding disciples cry, "All men seek You; stay in Capernaum!" But He thinks of the myriads who do not seek Him, but need Him more than those who do! Let His zeal for the unseeking multitudes inflame our hearts and let us, in enthusiastic chorus, sing concerning the lost sheep—

"O, come, let us go and find them!

In the paths of death they roam!

At the close of the day it will be sweet to say,

'I have brought some lost one home.'" Jesus seemed to say, "Come with Me and I will lead the way, for therefore am I sent, that all over Galilee and Judea I may wander after wandering souls and give them health of body and salvation of spirit."

This absorption in His life-purpose is one great evidence and accompaniment of our Lord's perfect spiritual sanity. He could not repose in work done, for the work which remained drove Him always onward! I say not that the Master could possibly have gloried—He never did glory—never would have gloried with any sinful pride. But in your case and mine, the way to keep from ever glorying in what we have done is to think of what we have yet to do—

"Forget the steps already trod,

And onward urge your way."

You know what the general said when one of his officers rode up and cried, "Sir, we have taken a standard!" "Take another," he cried. Another officer salutes him and exclaims, "Sir, we have taken two guns." "Take two more," was the only reply. This way lies the reward of holy service—you have done much—you shall do more. Have you won a soul? Win another! Did you bring 50 to Christ? Bring 50 more! If you have been faithful in little, you shall be entrusted with much.

What is all we have accomplished compared with the necessities of this immeasurable city, compared with the needs of our nation, compared with the desolated condition of the world? Brothers, in the hour of

success, resolve on wider labor. Go forward! Press on! Go to other cities. Attempt other methods of service, for therefore came you forth from

God.

IV. Now I must close—compelled to do so by the incessant ticking of the clock—when I have noticed how the Lord Jesus Christ in all things makes us see **PREACHING PUT TO THE FRONT**, for He says, "Let us go into the next towns, that I may preach there also: for therefore came I forth." It is refreshing to hear preaching spoken of without a sneer. "The Pulpit is a worn-out piece of furniture," so they say. Printers have quite annihilated preachers—the few of us who survive may as well go home to our beds! Well, I am not going to speak of any excellence in preachers, or stand up for my Brothers as though we were the wisest of all men. Suppose I confess that we are a set of fools? This is nothing remark-able—we have always been so!

But it still remains written in Scripture, "It pleased God, by the foolishness of preaching, to save them that believe." Such is our folly that we are fools enough to go on preaching after our critics have decided that we belong to the dead past! The wise men tell us about our day being over, but notwithstanding all of that, we shall keep to our marching orders—"Go you into all the world and preach!" In that day when stock shall be taken of results and judgment shall be according to equity, it will be found that the preachers of the Gospel have, after all, with all their imperfections, been the great instruments in the hands of God for bringing in His people to eternal salvation!

The people are supposed to read books in these times of the School Board and, therefore, they do not need living speech. We are glad that the people should read, but much of what they read which is best worth reading was first heard from the pulpit! We know of no rivalry between the printed word and the preached Word—it is often the same thing. But I reckon that the most of you who have been converted to God will say that it was not what you read, but what you heard which was used of the Holy Spirit for your conversion! When heart speaks to heart with accents of emotion, it is

somehow different from the paper. Some Brothers read their sermons and I do not condemn them, but I know that most of the people feel a kind of chill creeping over them as they hear the leaves rustle. It may be a prejudice, but I know that nine out of 10 are numbed by the foolscap for the reading.

I confess I feel the influence myself—a read sermon usually freezes me to the marrow, or else makes me fidget upon my seat. When a warm heart speaks to an earnest ear, it proves itself a suitable means for the transmission of blessing. The man bears witness better than the paper can! He speaks what he knows and he throws a tone, a force, a light, a vigor into what he says which the printing press cannot possibly communicate to the page! I know you grumble at the dullness of preachers and I do not wonder at it, but I believe that the improvement of that matter lies much with yourselves. You shall find, I believe, that when more attention has been paid to the ministry—when you have prayed more for students— and when more care has been exercised in churches that only the right kind of men shall be helped into the ministry, the preachers of the Word of God will rise into higher rank in esteem.

When, instead of a man's being set apart for a minister because his father has a living to give him. Or because he cannot pick up a subsistence anywhere else. When, instead of the power of simony and patronage—men shall only be introduced into the ministry who are really moved by the Holy Spirit—then the dishonor will be wiped from the pulpit and it shall be seen to be the tower of the flock, the castle of the Truth of God. We preach Christ Crucified and preach it because we are commanded to preach it. And we

are well assured that wisdom is justified of her children. God's grand means of preaching the Gospel, which the Lord Jesus followed so closely, is used for the sure accomplishment of eternal purposes!

I leave that point, because I need to say this much more—it is the praying man that is the right preaching man—and if any of you long to do good to your fellow men, you must begin on your knees! You cannot have power with man for God until first you have power with God for man! Solitary prayer was the equipment for the Prince of Preachers when He came forth among the crowds—it is the best equipment for you, also. In solitary vigil, buckle on the armor of the Light of God. Workers for God, I entreat you to be abundant in supplication, that if success comes, you may not be elevated unduly by it. That if failure comes, you may not be depressed unduly by it. Come what may, having prayed, it is yours to continue steadfast in present duty, still doing that for which you were sent, and still believing that the Gospel of Jesus will prevail. Oh, my Comrades, may the Lord uphold us even to the end!

As for you here present who never pray, what will become of you? As for you who, instead of preaching, do not care to hear preaching, what will become of you? If the Lord Jesus Christ went out to pray so early in the morning, do you know what He was praying for? Why, for the salvation of sinners like you, that you might be saved! His cries and tears were for those who neither plead nor weep for themselves! When Jesus stood up to preach, what had He on His mind but the salvation of sinners like you? Shall He think of you and will you not think of Him? Oh, look to Him! See how He loves sinners!

Now that He has been dead and buried, and has risen again and gone into His Glory, He still lives to save sinners! Look to Him! Trust Him! Seek Him, tonight, in solitary prayer, and He will meet with you. Tomorrow morning rise up early, "a great while before day," if you have no other means of being alone, and cry to Him for mercy and He will set Heaven's gate open before you—and answer you even as His Father answered Him! The Lord bless you, for Christ's sake. Amen.

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