

The School of Obedience

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4. The Morning Watch in the Life of Obedience

'If the firstfruit be holy, the lump is also holy; and if the root be holy, so are the branches.' -
(Romans 11:16)

How wonderful and blessed is the divine appointment of the first day of the week as a holy day of rest. Not, (as some think), that we might have at least one day of rest and spiritual refreshment amid the weariness of life, but that that one holy day, at the opening of the week, might sanctify the whole, might help and fit us to carry GOD's holy presence into all the week and its work. With the first-fruit holy, the whole lump is holy; with the root holy, all the branches are holy too.

How gracious, too, the provision suggested by so many types and examples of the Old Testament, by which a morning hour at the opening of the day can enable us to secure a blessing for all its work, and give us the assurance of

POWER FOR VICTORY

over every temptation. How unspeakably gracious, that in the morning hour the bond that unites us with GOD can be so firmly tied that during hours when we have to move amid the rush of men or duties, and can scarce think of GOD, the soul can be kept safe and pure; that the soul can so give itself away, in the time of secret worship, into His keeping, that temptation shall only help us to unite it closer with Him. What cause for praise and joy, that the morning watch can so each day renew and strengthen the surrender to JESUS and the faith in Him, that the life of obedience can not only be maintained in fresh vigor, but can indeed go on from strength to strength.

I would fain point out how intimate and vital the connection between obedience and the morning watch is. The desire for a life of entire obedience will give new meaning and value to the morning watch, even as this again can alone give the strength and courage needed for the former.

I. THE MOTIVE PRINCIPLE

Think first of the motive principle that will make us love and faithfully keep the morning watch.

If we take it upon us simply as a duty, and a necessary part of our religious life, it will very soon become a burden. Or, if the chief thought be our own happiness and safety, that will not supply the power to make it truly attractive. There is only one thing will suffice - the desire for

fellowship with GOD.

It is for that we were created in GOD's likeness. It is that in which we hope to spend eternity. It is that alone can fit us for a true and blessed life, either here, or hereafter. To have more of GOD, to know Him better, to receive from Him the communication of His love and strength, to have our life filled with His,- it is for this He invites us to enter the inner chamber and shut the door.

It is in the closet, in the morning watch, that our spiritual life is both tested and strengthened. There is the battlefield where it is to be decided every day whether GOD is to have all, whether our life is to be absolute obedience. If we truly conquer there, getting rid of ourselves into the hands of our Almighty Lord, the victory during the day is sure. It is there, in the inner chamber, proof is to be given whether we really delight in GOD, and make it our aim to love Him with our whole heart.

Let this, then, be our first lesson: the presence of GOD is the chief thing, in our devotions. To meet GOD, to give ourselves into His holy will, to know that we are pleasing to Him, to have Him give us our orders, and lay His hand upon us, and bless us, and say to us, Go in this thy strength - it is when the soul learns that this is what is to be found in the morning watch, day by day, that we shall learn to long for it and delight in it.

II. READING THE BIBLE

Let us next speak of the reading of GOD's Word, as part of what occupies us there. With regard to this I have more than one thing I wish to say.

1. One is that unless we beware, the Word, which is meant to point us away to GOD, may actually intervene and hide Him from us.

The mind may be occupied and interested and delighted at what it finds, and yet, because this is more head knowledge than anything else, it may bring little good to us. If it does not lead us to wait on GOD, to glorify Him, to receive His grace and power for sweetening and sanctifying our lives, it becomes a hindrance instead of a help.

2. Another lesson that cannot be repeated too often, or pressed too urgently, is that it is only by the teaching of the HOLY GHOST that we can get at the real meaning of what GOD means by His Word, and that the Word will really reach into our inner life, and work in us.

The Father in Heaven, who gave us His Word from Heaven, with its divine mysteries and message, has given us His HOLY SPIRIT in us, to explain and internally appropriate that Word. The Father wants us each time to ask that He teach us by His Spirit. He wants us to bow in a meek, teachable frame of mind, and believe that the Spirit will, in the hidden depth of our heart, make His Word live and work. He wants us to remember that the Spirit is given us that we should be led by Him, should walk after Him, should have our whole life under His rule, and that therefore He cannot teach us in the morning unless we honestly give up ourselves to His leading. But if we do this and patiently wait on Him, not to get new thoughts but to get the power of the Word in our heart, we can count upon His teaching.

Let your closet be the classroom, let your morning watch be the study hour, in which your relation of entire dependence on, and submission to, the HOLY SPIRIT's teaching is proved to GOD.

3. A third remark I want to make, in confirmation of what was said above, is this: ever study in GOD's Word in the spirit of an unreserved surrender to obey.

You know how often CHRIST, and His apostles in their Epistles, speak of hearing and not doing. If you accustom yourself to study the Bible without an earnest and very definite purpose to obey, you are getting hardened in disobedience.

Never read GOD's will concerning you without honestly giving up yourself to do it at once, and asking grace to do so. GOD has given us His Word, to tell us what He wants us to do and what grace He has provided to enable us to do it: how sad to think it a pious thing just to read that Word without any earnest effort to obey it! May GOD keep us from this terrible sin!

Let us make it a sacred habit to say to GOD, *'Lord, whatever I know to be Thy will, I will at once obey.'* Ever read with a heart yielded up in willing obedience.

4. One more remark. I have here spoken of such commands as we already know, and as are easily understood. But, remember, there are a great many commands to which your attention may never have been directed, or others of which the application is so wide and unceasing that you have not taken it in. Read GOD's Word with a deep desire to know all His will.

If there are things which appear difficult, commands which look too high, or for which you need a divine guidance to tell you how to carry them out,- and there are many such,- let them drive you to seek a divine teaching. It is not the text that is easiest and most encouraging that brings most blessing, but the text, whether easy or difficult, which throws you most upon GOD.

GOD would have you *'filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding'*; it is in the closet this wonderful work is to be done. Do remember, it is only when you know that GOD is telling you to do a thing that you feel sure He gives the strength to do it. It is only as we are willing to know all GOD's will that He will from time to time reveal more of it to us, and that we will be able to do it all.

What a power the morning watch may be in the life of one who makes a determined resolve to meet GOD there; to renew the surrender to absolute obedience; humbly and patiently to wait on the HOLY SPIRIT to be taught all GOD's will; and to receive the assurance that every promise given him in the Word will infallibly be made true! He that thus prays for himself, will become a true intercessor for others.

III. PRAYER

It is in the light of these thoughts I want now to say a few words on what prayer is to be in the morning watch.

1. First of all, see that you secure the presence of GOD.

Do not be content with anything less than seeing the face of GOD, having the assurance that He is looking on you in love, and listening and working in you.

If our daily life is to be full of GOD, how much more the morning hour, where the life of the day alone can have GOD's seal stamped upon it. In our religion we want nothing so much as MORE OF GOD - His love, His will, His holiness, His Spirit living in us, His power working in us for men. Under Heaven there is no way of getting this but by close personal communion. And there is no time so good for securing and practicing it, as the morning watch.

The superficiality and feebleness of our religion and religious work all come from having so little real contact with GOD. If it be true that GOD alone is the fountain of all love and good and happiness, and that to have as much as possible of His presence and His fellowship, of His will and His service, is our truest and highest happiness, surely then to meet Himself alone in the morning watch ought to be

OUR FIRST CARE

To have had GOD appear to them, and speak to them, was with all the Old Testament saints the secret of their obedience and their strength. Do give GOD time in secret so to reveal Himself, that your soul may call the name of the place Peniel,- *'for I have seen God face to face.'*

2. My next thought is: let the renewal of your surrender to absolute obedience for that day be a chief part of your morning sacrifice.

Let any confession of sin be very definite - a plucking out and cutting off of everything that has been grieving to GOD. Let any prayer for grace for a holy walk be as definite - an asking and accepting in faith of the very grace and strength you are specially in need of. Let your outlook on the day you are entering on be a very determined resolve that obedience to GOD shall be

ITS CONTROLLING PRINCIPLE

Do understand that there is no surer way, rather, that there is no other possible way, of getting into GOD's love and blessing in prayer, than by getting into His will. In prayer, give up yourself most absolutely to the blessed will of GOD: this will avail more than much asking.

Beseech GOD to show you this great mercy, that He allows you, that He will enable you, to enter into His will, and abide there - that will make the knowing and doing His will in your life a blessed certainty. Let your prayer indeed be a 'morning sacrifice,' a placing yourself as a whole burnt-offering on the altar of the Lord.

The measure of surrender to full obedience will be the measure of confidence toward GOD.

3. Then remember that true prayer and fellowship with GOD cannot be all from one side.

We need to be still, to wait and hear what response GOD gives. This is the office of the HOLY SPIRIT, to be the voice of GOD to us. In the hidden depths of the heart, He can give a secret but

most certain assurance that we are heard, that we are well-pleasing, that the Father engages to do for us what we have asked.

What we need, to hear the Voice, to receive this assurance, is the quiet stillness that waits on GOD, the quiet faith that trusts in GOD, the quiet heart that bows in nothingness and humility before GOD, and allows Him to be all in all.

It is when GOD is waited on to take His part in our prayer that the confidence will come to us that we receive what we ask, that our surrender of ourselves in the sacrifice of obedience is accepted, and that therefore we can count upon the HOLY SPIRIT to guide us into all the will of GOD, as He means us to know and do it.

What glory would come to us in the morning watch, and through it into our daily life, if it were thus made an hour spent with the Triune GOD, for the Father, through the Son and the Spirit, to take conscious possession of us for the day. How little need there then would be to urge and plead with GOD's children to watch the morning watch!

4. And now comes the last and the best of all. Let your prayer be intercessional, on behalf of others.

In the obedience of our Lord JESUS, as in all His fellowship with the Father, the essential element was - it was all for others. This Spirit flows through every member of the body; the more we know it, and yield to it, the more will our life be what GOD would make it. The highest form of prayer is intercession. The chief object for which GOD chose Abraham and Israel and us was to make us a blessing to the world. We are a royal priesthood - a priestly people. As long as prayer is only a means of personal improvement and happiness, we cannot know its full power.

Let intercession be a real longing for the souls of those around us, a real bearing of the burden of their sin and need, a real pleading for the extension of GOD's kingdom, real labor in prayer for definite purposes to be realized - let such intercession be what the morning watch is consecrated to, and see what new interest and attraction it will have.

Intercession! Oh to realize what it means! To take the name, and the righteousness, and the worthiness of CHRIST, to put them on, and in them to appear before GOD! *'In Christ's stead,'* now that He is no longer in the world, to beseech GOD, by name, for the individual men and needs, where His grace can do its work!

In the faith of our own acceptance, and of the anointing with the Spirit to fit us for the work, to know that our prayer can avail to *'save a soul from death,'* can bring down and dispense the blessing of Heaven upon earth! To think that in the hour of the morning watch this work can be renewed and carried on day by day, each inner chamber maintaining its own separate communication with Heaven, and helping together in bringing down its share of the blessing.

It is in intercession, more than in the zeal that works in its own strength with little prayer, that the highest type of piety, the true Christlikeness is cultivated. It is in intercession that a believer rises to his true nobility in the power of imparting life and blessing. It is to intercession we must look for any large increase of the power of GOD in the Church and its work for men.

One word in conclusion. Turn back and think now again about

THE INTIMATE AND VITAL CONNECTION

between obedience and the morning watch.

Without obedience there cannot be the spiritual power to enter into the knowledge of GOD's Word and will. Without obedience there cannot be the confidence, the boldness, the liberty that knows that it is heard. Obedience is fellowship with GOD in His will; without it there is not the capacity for seeing and claiming and holding the blessings He has for us.

And so, on the other side, without very definite living communion with GOD in the morning watch, the life of obedience cannot possibly be maintained. It is there that the vow of obedience can every morning be renewed in power and confirmed from above.

It is there that the presence and fellowship can be secured which make obedience possible. It is there that in the obedience of the One, and in the union with Himself, the strength is received for all that GOD can ask. It is there that the spiritual understanding of GOD's will is received, which leads to walk worthy of the Lord to all well-pleasing.

GOD has called His children to live a wonderful, heavenly, altogether supernatural life. Let the morning watch each day be to you as

THE OPEN GATE OF HEAVEN,

through which its light and power streams in on your waiting heart, and from which you go out to walk with GOD all the day.

~ end of chapter 4 ~
