

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

As prayer is the most exalted experience of which the mind of man is capable, so it is the least patient of analysis. The manner in which the Spirit of God acts upon the human spirit must ever remain a mystery. For ourselves, we have not made much progress in the exercise of prayer, if we are not acutely sensible of the insistence of desires so vast and formless that they fail to convey a distinct image to the mind: at such times our supplications express themselves only in groanings that cannot be uttered (Rom. 8:26). Nor shall we be able rightly to estimate the prayer-life of another, until we have first sounded the depths of his personality, our insight piercing to the dividing of soul and spirit. How impossible, then, must it be for us to speak worthily of our Saviour's intercession! The secret of His wondrous Person is treasured and safeguarded in His life of prayer, but it is revealed as yet only in part, for "no one knoweth the Son save the Father" (Matt. 11:27).

Our Lord entered into creaturehood and was manifested in the likeness of sinful flesh. He was born under law; He bowed with submission before the divine will. His spiritual life was nourished, as ours is, by the means of grace. As the Son of Man He preserved communion with the Father through prayer. We are privileged from time to time to overhear His priestly utterances before God; but we are rarely admitted into the oratory where His private requests were offered. Such joyous intimacy, such earnestness, such filial reverence as were displayed in those high communings with the Unseen, must far transcend our narrow experience. Never man prayed like this Man.

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In one important particular, the prayers of the Lord were unlike those of other men. He who knew no sin, but always did the things that pleased the Father (2 Cor. 5:21; John 8:29), had no confession of unworthiness to offer to God. His was "the only conscience without a scar." There could, therefore, be no bar to communion with the Holy One, no distance required to be surmounted, no way of access had to be devised and secured. At the close of His earthly life, He lifted up to the Father for acceptance the full tale of His sinless years, saying, "I glorified Thee on the earth, having accomplished the work which Thou hast given Me to do. And now, O Father, glorify Thou Me with Thine own self" (John 17: 4-5).

The prayers of the Lord Jesus, though little is said of this in Scripture, must have been radiant with thanksgiving. Even in that dark hour when Capernaum, His own city, rejected Him, He rejoiced in the Holy Spirit, and said, "I thank Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that Thou didst hide these things from the wise and understanding, and didst reveal them unto babes: yea, Father, for so it was well-pleasing in Thy sight" (Luke 10:21). His grateful devotion pierced the clouds, and poured forth under the blue heavens a song of adoring praise, sweeter than the hymns of angels. Even when He stood within one hour of Gethsemane's agony, within a day of Calvary's thick darkness, He testified to the buoyancy of His spirit: "Now I come to Thee; and these things I speak in the world, that they may have My joy fulfilled in themselves" (John 17:13). And the disciples understood; they knew that there was no happier man in Jerusalem that night than He who was thus anointed with the oil of gladness above His fellows (Heb. 1:9).

We cannot doubt that much of the Saviour's engagement with heaven in His hours of solitary prayer was in the communion of holy love with the Father. On the mountain-edge there was, we may believe, a nightly renewal of that fellowship which is beyond knowledge, an interchange of affection which the Incarnation had not weakened, though it had lessened its sweet immediacy. So that, mingling with the ineffable repose of the Son in the bosom of the Father, there ran the strain of eager longing which was to

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find its full expression in the High-Priestly Prayer: "And now, O Father, glorify Thou Me with Thine own self with the glory which I had with Thee before the world was. . . . for Thou lovedst Me before the foundation of the world" (John 17:5, 24). The Son of Man dwelt ever in the presence of God; and yet, in the days of His flesh, He yearned for that glad hour when, having completed His redemptive toil, He should ascend from His voluntary humiliation to the Uncreated Glory, and, bringing our manhood with Him, resume His Session in God.

We must not, however, suppose that the prayers of the Lord were only thanksgiving and adoration. He had many requests to offer, in supplication and intercession. He prayed for His disciples—for their escape from temptation (Luke 22:32), for the success of their labours (Luke 10:18), for their advancement in holiness and love (John 17:11). He prayed for those who were still strangers to His grace—the world of men (John 17:21, 23), the tribes of the House of Israel (Luke 10:2), the rebellious children of Jerusalem, to whom He had stretched out His hands, no man regarding (Luke 19:42; Matt. 23:37), the soldiers who pierced His hands and feet (Luke 23:34). And for Himself He prayed—for guidance in the crises of His life (Luke 6:12), for the continued supply of power in the prosecution of His ministry (Luke 11:1), for life to be granted at His word to Lazarus lying dead (John 11:41-42); that, if it were possible, the bitter cup might pass from Him (Matt. 26:39), or, failing this, that the will of His Father might be fully wrought (v. 42).

"I know that Thou hearest Me always," (John 11:42) said the Saviour at the tomb of Lazarus. All His prayers were answered. But it must be remembered that there were petitions which He refused to offer. In the ignominy of His arrest He said to Simon, "Thinkest thou that I cannot beseech my Father and He shall even now send Me more than twelve legions of angels? How then should the Scriptures be fulfilled, that thus it must be?" (Matt 26:53-54). He would not ask to be delivered from the hands of men. Not many days before, anticipation of the agony that was so soon to fall had

forced from Him the cry, "Now is My soul troubled, and what shall I say? Shall I say, 'Father, save Me from this hour?' But for this cause came I unto this hour. Father, glorify Thy name" (John 12:27-28). He will not offer prayer except within the will of God. And so long as that will has not been fully revealed, His requests are tendered with submissiveness: "Not My will, but Thine, be done" (Luke 22:42).

His prayers were always heard, but the answer did not always come at once. God, it has been said, has His seasons and delays; even the Son must wait upon the divine wisdom. The Lord Jesus prayed that Israel might repent and turn to the Lord, but for two thousand years the Chosen Race has been wandering in the wilderness. He prayed that the nations should be given to Him for an inheritance and the uttermost parts of the earth to be His possession (Ps. 2:8), but to this hour "the whole world lieth in the evil one" (1 John 5:19). Nevertheless, it is written that the rejecters of the Messiah shall one day look on Him whom they have pierced, and mourn (Zech. 12:10). And for our sad, sin-cursed earth, the day is drawing near when the kingdom of the world shall become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign for ever and ever (Rev. 11:15).

As we have indicated, those prayers of Christ which are referred to in the Gospels are for the most part concerned with His mediatorial work. The Surety claims for His people the fullness of the divine mercy; the Good Shepherd makes intercession for the flock which He is about to purchase with His blood.

Accordingly, so far as the record informs us, our Lord's engagements in prayer, with scarcely an exception, gather round that act of allegiance to the will of God by which the Redeemer bowed Himself under the curse, assuming our sin as His own. Let us note these instances among others: His Baptism, His Temptation, His Preparation for the Calling of the Twelve, His Supplication after the Feeding of the Five Thousand, the High-Priestly Prayer, the Agony in the Garden, and the Voices of His Passion. All these have Golgotha in view; they are the disclosure to us of what death meant to Christ. To the Saviour the mere article of dissolution could only prove to be

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the striking off of earthly fetters and the return to the Right Hand of power. Nor could the fierce aspect of the torturing cross terrify this Man, most fearless of all who have looked with unflinching eyes on pain. His royal spirit made Him in this, as in all else, more than conqueror. But the death that occupied His waking thoughts, and became the predominant theme of His supplications, until He came to “inhabit His passion,” was such a death as no son of Adam had ever undergone. Countless millions have paid the debt to nature, but our blessed Lord *tasted death* for every man (Heb. 2:9). “It is Christ that died” (Rom. 8:34). The prayers of Jesus are written red in the blood of sacrifice. And so they reveal to us, as no other words have done, what the Cross signified to Him who passed His earthly life under its benign but awful shadow.

The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews tells us that our Lord “learned obedience by the things which He suffered” and associates this discipline with the exercise of prayer: “He offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears” (Heb 5:7-8). These words recall to our minds the agony in the Garden, but perhaps they have a wider reference. Not only upon Olivet, but often elsewhere, our Lord may have been plunged into anguish and amazement. On such occasions His refuge was the audience-chamber of God. And there, in the divine embrace, He became perfect through suffering (Heb 2:10; 5:8). In many of the Psalms and in the Prophetic Word, the sorrows of the saints seem to mirror the experience of the Master: “Out of the depths have I cried unto thee, O Lord. . . I wait for the Lord, my soul doth wait, and in His word do I hope. My soul looketh for the Lord, more than the watchmen look for the morning” (Ps. 130:1, 5-6).

The intensity of the prayers of the Saviour was equalled only by the unconquerable faith in which they were presented to the Father. The word of encouragement to the ruler of the synagogue, “Fear not; only believe” (Mark 5:36), must often have been addressed to His own spirit. It was, no doubt, out of His own experience that He spoke, when He laid on His disciples the supreme condition of their acceptable approach to the Father:

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Have faith in God. Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall say unto this mountain, Be thou taken up, and cast into the sea; and shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe that what he saith cometh to pass; he shall have it. Therefore I say unto you. All things whatsoever ye pray and ask for, believe that ye have received them, and ye shall have them. (Mark 11:22-24)

He confronted apparent disaster with undoubting heart; in desertion and forsakenness He comforted Himself with the thought: "The Father is with Me." He embraced the cross, pillowing His dying head upon the ordered covenant. His enemies, gathering round the tortured Son of God, bore witness to the most patent feature of His holy character: "He trusteth on God" (Matt 27:43). They marked that then, in that dread hour, His confidence in the Eternal Love was undimmed.

Ere His ministry drew to a close, our Lord antedated His passion and prepared to enter on that heavenly priesthood which had awaited Him from the first of time. "Father," He exclaims, "that which Thou hast given Me, I will that, where I am, they also may be with Me; that they may behold My glory, which Thou hast given Me: for Thou lovedst Me before the foundation of the world" (John 17:24). This is not the plea of suffering manhood; it is a request by One who holds the right of intervention on behalf of His tried and afflicted people. This heavenly ministry our High Priest shall exercise till the end of all the ages, for He liveth to make intercession for us. And His advocacy is for ever presented in the power of an accepted Sacrifice.

CHAPTER 2

The Holy Child

Our Lord Jesus was nurtured in a home in which prayer was a habitual exercise. The spirit of devotion presided over all the household arrangements, and every duty of the day was jewelled with acts of worship. If it be true that

Prayer is the simplest form of speech
That infant lips can try,

we shall not be able to date the beginning of our Lord's prayer-life. In His earliest childhood His mother would recite to Him many of the Hebrew Psalms, to this day the fountains of our purest devotion. Joseph would carefully impress upon Him the first and greatest precept of the law, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might," and love would certainly find expression in communion with the Beloved. As soon as the young Child had learned letters, the Sacred Writings were placed in His hand. As He bent over the parchments, heaven would open above Him, and He would be at rest in the home of God. We may be sure that in youth, as in later years, His every thought turned heavenward, His every word was spoken in the audience of the Father. There would also be with the boy Jesus, as with other Hebrew children, a cheerful observance of the ritual of the day; He would pass through ordered seasons of prayer, public and private.

We may let our imagination linger over the spiritual exercises of the

Holy Child, but where Scripture is silent we must refrain from speech. It is perhaps impossible for us to understand the unfolding of a spirit innocent of sin and supremely recipient of God.

The one flower plucked from the garden of that blameless childhood speaks to us of a tender intimacy existing between Jesus and His heavenly Father, and seems to imply a heightening of spiritual experience. That we are not too bold in suggesting this appears in the words written in the Gospel of the Infancy, probably by the mother's hand: "Jesus advanced in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and men" (Luke 2:52). He had, with a devout humility, been anticipating His entrance on the full privileges of covenant sonship with Jehovah, the God of Israel. The emotions which stir the heart of a Christian youth, who is looking forward to his first public profession of faith at the Table of the Lord, may help us, if only in a limited measure, to understand the prayerful desire which filled the mind of Jesus as He addressed Himself to meet the solemn obligations that were imposed on one who should become a son of the law. Nor did He refuse to make a confidante of His mother. His filial remonstrance, when His mother breathlessly rebuked Him, leads us to infer that she ought to have remembered the sacred revealings of His heart disclosed to her in the Nazareth home, when the Passover festival was drawing night: "How is it that ye sought Me? Wist ye not that I must be in My Father's house?" (Luke 2:49).

Now we may think of the Youth whose schooldays are ended, and who has been apprenticed to the trade of carpenter and builder. He would join not only in the worship of the home, but also in the prayers of the synagogue, breathing into them, without doubt, a deeper meaning than that which lay in the mere letter of the word, as He supplicated Heaven's mercy, not only on His fellow-townsmen of Nazareth, but on all the people of Israel and on the Seventy Nations beyond.

During those years, our Lord acquired a remarkable familiarity with the ancient Scriptures. In the cottage of Joseph the carpenter—himself a son of David—there would probably be found some of the sacred scrolls:

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Deuteronomy, the Psalms, Isaiah, perhaps, if we may draw any conclusion from the frequent appeal which the Lord Jesus made to these books. For some of the other Holy Writings, He may have been dependent on the synagogue chest. Nor can we think of His study of his Father's word—for such it was to him—without picturing to ourselves the continual uprising of His thoughts toward that Holy One whom the open scroll revealed. Our Lord's study of the Scriptures must have been inwrought, like some costly mosaic, with praise and adoration, petition and intercession. He would inlay every commandment in renewed consecration, every promise in heartfelt acceptance, every disclosure of the divine character in thanksgiving. Each separate word of God would be wrought by prayer into the framework of His life.

That there were special times of prayer, quiet hours of waiting upon God, when the youthful Carpenter of Nazareth withdrew from His fellows and from His tasks, and sought in solitude the face of His Father, we may be sure—not merely from our sense of what is fitting and needful, but also from our Lord's practice in the days of His ministry. Then, He continually sought the mountain silences. In Nazareth, He may often have climbed the hill that rises above the village, that He might be alone with God; more often, perhaps, He entered into the “closet,” the little storeroom tucked in between the living-room and the workshop. Is there not a touch of reminiscence in these words: “Thou, when thou prayest, enter into thine inner chamber, and having shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret, and thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall recompense thee” (Matt 6:6)?

It is good for us to remember this. A zealous labourer in the kingdom of God may say, “I am too busy to spend much time in prayer; and ‘work,’ you know, ‘is prayer.’” Another, occupying a different standpoint, may profess, “I am praying all day long; I do not need to observe set seasons; my entire life is one of intercourse with Heaven.” But we have not so learned Christ. No one was so careful to buy up the opportunity as He, no one maintained so heavenly a poise of spirit, yet the hours hastened while He prayed.

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The experience of all saints is clear upon this, that we must carve out of the busiest day a quiet space in which we shall be silent before God. We must summon ourselves before the divine tribunal, permitting the light of God to stream in upon us, searching every motive, bringing every hidden thing to light, granting to us a fresh sense of pardon and acceptance, and revealing in new and ever more glorious aspects the divine holiness. So shall there be wrought in us the spirit of grace and of supplications. And God, even our own God, shall bless us.

CHAPTER 3

On the Threshold of His Ministry

From Malachi, until the advent of John the son of Zacharias, there were in Israel moralists and historians, psalmists and seers, but no prophet. For centuries men had been asking for an immediate utterance of God, but the voice of prophecy was silent.

John was in the deserts until the day of his showing unto Israel. We may suppose that, as he dwelt in his father's house in the hill country of Judea, the burden of the nation's guilt oppressed him. It was a time of spiritual darkness; the maxims of the age were worldly, and the practice of the people was ungodly. John fled from contamination as from a pestilence: he had "known pureness from a child," and the very touch of sin pained him. He left behind him the voices of earth, and in the solitary places of the desert prayed, "Speak, Lord; Thy servant heareth."

Then "the word of the Lord came unto John the son of Zacharias in the wilderness" (Luke 3:2). And with the word, power was given. He returned to the haunts of men, clad in the investiture of the Spirit. His message was that which had been spoken by the prophets of the olden time, soon to be caught up afresh and proclaimed by our Lord and His apostles: "Repent, and believe the Gospel" (Mark 1:15)—the eternal announcement of the divine mercy. "Then went out unto him Jerusalem, and all Judea, and all the region round about Jordan" (Matt. 3:5). Soldiers of Rome, tax-gatherers,

vine-dressers, and fishermen—all the best in Israel, and all the worst, were there (Luke 3:10-14). Many of the Pharisees and Sadducees came in curiosity, but they did not submit to the baptism of John.

1. THE BAPTISM OF JESUS

Baptism was an ancient rite in Israel, and it had been employed in later years to seal the admission of Gentile proselytes to the household of promise. The new feature of this ceremony in the hands of John was that it was administered to Israel. A proselyte was said to be “newborn” when he submitted to the ordinance of baptism, so that in this rite John is saying to priest and scribe, “Ye must be born again” (John 3:7).

But if the official classes of religious Israelites refused to humble themselves in submission to the baptism of repentance, a Greater than they stooped to receive it: “Then cometh Jesus to the Jordan unto John, to be baptised of him” (Matt. 3:13). All the postulants for baptism, until now, had come confessing sin. Jesus came in the way of righteousness (cf. Matt 3:15). He had no sin to confess; why, then, did He take the place of a sinner?

In His incarnation He entered our nature, taking our liabilities upon Himself. Our Kinsman-Redeemer, He came to be our Surety and Substitute. And now, as He is set apart for His Messianic ministry, He joins himself to the communion of sinners, accepting baptism in waters that had borne away the guilt of an ungodly nation. In an act of humiliation, to be perfected only on the cross, He unites Himself with the fallen race.

This, in His covenant relation to His people.

Personally, however, His baptism was His self-consecration to the duties of the august service which He had undertaken: “Now it came to pass, when all the people were baptised, that Jesus also having been baptised and praying, the heaven was opened, and the Holy Ghost descended in a bodily form, as a dove, upon Him, and a voice came out of heaven, Thou art My beloved Son; in Thee I am well pleased” (Luke 3:21-22).

The decisive step has been taken, the ordinance which ratified the

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momentous transaction has been administered, and now Jesus gives Himself to prayer. In this prayer, as we may believe, all the motives and purposes which gather round the solemn act of His baptism find expression.

(a) He accepts the commission entrusted to Him. He arrays Himself in the mantle of the Messiah—Jesus is now the Christ. All the Scriptures have foretold His coming and declared His mighty acts. And not as the Christ only: He is proclaimed to be God’s very Son. As in eternity He received from the Father a multitude of lost souls and engaged to die for them; so, in the inauguration of His earthly ministry, in human weakness and under the shadow of death, He renews the high, eternal covenant in God.

(b) He offers Himself as the propitiation for the sins of a lost world. The voice from the opened heavens, “This is My beloved Son, in Whom I am well pleased,” is reminiscent of the Isaianic prophecy of the Servant of Jehovah (Isa. 42:1). For such an announcement there must have been a preparedness in the mind of Christ. The voice came out of heaven, but it was responded to in the depths of our Lord’s consciousness. The Servant foretold was Israel’s Messiah, predestined to suffer. It was of Him that the epitaph was inscribed by the Father, as on the rock-hewn tomb:

He poured out His soul unto death,
And was numbered with the transgressors:
Yet He bare the sin of many,
And maketh intercession for the transgressors.

—Isa. 53:12

This Sufferer is now declared from heaven to be none other than Jesus the Nazarene, and the young Prophet of Galilee girds Himself for His passion. A path of thorns, with a cross at the end of the way, this our Lord in Jordan prayerfully enters upon.

(c) He asks for Himself a sufficiency of grace and strength—that He may have “an honourable through-bearing.” Now the Spirit descends to dwell with the sinless One; the Lord of the house has come to His temple, saying,

“This is My rest for ever: here will I stay; for I have desired it.” This advent of the Spirit, however, is only the completion of a uniting act prolonged over thirty years. Our Lord Jesus was Spirit-born (Luke 1:35), Spirit-taught (Isa. 11:2), Spirit-engraced (Isa. 61:1); from this hour, in an especial manner, He is Spirit-empowered.

The mystery of the descent of the Spirit upon the Son lies hidden in the depths of the Divine Nature; yet is partly revealed in the Incarnation of the Word, for the Spirit of God is the bond of union between the dual elements in the Person of Christ. But, as it behooved Him to be made in all things like unto His brethren (Heb. 2:17), we may gather from our narrow experience something of what the donation of the Spirit at Jordan must have meant to our Saviour.

A minister who is being inducted into the pastoral charge of a congregation, a missionary who is being set apart for foreign service, asks for, and by faith receives, the enduement of power from on high. The gifts bestowed are adequate to the necessities of the work entrusted to him. He puts on the robe of strength, even as our Lord has said (Luke 24:49). But the endowment which the Saviour craved was that sovereign gift of power which would enable Him to bear away the sins of the world, destroy the works of the devil, dethrone the evil one who had usurped dominion, make an end of sin, and open the gates of life to all who should believe. He asked, and all power in heaven and on earth was placed at His disposal. But the power came with (and in) the Spirit. By the Spirit He cast out devils (Matt. 12:28), by the Spirit He gave commandment unto the apostles whom He had chosen (Acts 1:2), and by the Eternal Spirit He offered Himself unto God as a “perfect redemption, propitiation, and satisfaction” for the sins of the whole world (Heb. 9:14).

2. THE TEMPTATION OF JESUS

In the story of the Temptation, related, one cannot doubt, by our Lord Himself, there is no mention of prayer. But the forty days' fast surely

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implies, and the parallelism of the temptation in the Wilderness with the agony in the Garden does at least suggest, that it was in a protracted season of supplication, which left a wanness as of death on our Lord's countenance (see John 1:29) and drew to Him a band of ministering angels, that the victory over the tempter was won.

The temptations which beset our Lord during the forty days of fasting are not recorded. But the triple assault which closed the series, and perhaps summed up the evil solicitations endured in this prolonged retreat, has been made known to us. The point of each of these last incitements of the tempter was that the Messiah should shun the predestined sorrow, and evade the way of the cross. "Master, pity Thyself."

(a) The first assault of this closing hour was an appeal to the principle of self-preservation: "If Thou be the Son of God, command that these stones become bread" (Matt. 4:3).

This is, in a more impellent form, the temptation before which our first parents fell. They were tempted in the Garden of delights, He in the Wilderness where wild beasts were His only companions.

They had all that heart could wish, except the right to partake of one seductive but deleterious fruit: He was faint with hunger and near to death. And with Him, as with them, the way for the entrance of temptation into the mind was prepared by the suggested doubt of the Father's love and truth. "If Thou be the Son of God." He has affirmed it, but is it true? And if true, where is the Father's care? Act independently. Provide for Thyself. Command these stones that they become bread.

Where exactly did the sinfulness of such a suggestion lie? It meant retraction of the Incarnation. He had entered into our nature, that He might live a holy life and die an atoning death in our proper manhood, living His life within the modes of our common humanity. It is true that He was God's co-essential Son, but it was not given Him to draw upon the resources of His divine nature. To draw upon them now would be to renounce His solidarity with the race.

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And as His coming into our manhood was by the decree and council of God, to reverse the great humiliation of His entrance into manhood would be to disobey that holy will to which He was always subject, and (if that were possible) to introduce discord into the Being of God. The principle of our Lord's activity as the Incarnate Word is thus stated by Himself: "The Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He seeth the Father doing; for what things soever He doeth, these the Son also doeth in like manner" (John 5:19).

(b) The second assault of the evil one according to the report given in the First Gospel—and this appears to be the natural order—passes from the personal to the national, as the third passes from the national to the world-wide. "The devil taketh Him into the holy city; and he set Him on the pinnacle of the temple." If Thou be the Son of God, said he, cast Thyself down and angel hands shall bear Thee up. Dazzle the people into faith; give them a sign, that they may believe (Matt 4:5-6).

The essence of this temptation is that He should accommodate Himself to the prejudices of the multitude, the traditions of the scribes, the vested interests of the priests. We seem to note in the Gospels a willingness on the part of the rulers to acknowledge Jesus as a prophet and teacher, provided that He should compromise on those points which most closely affected them. That He should, for example, do nothing to interfere with those monopolies which had made the house of Annas almost incredibly wealthy; that He should accept the unwritten law of the rabbis as of binding authority; that He should be willing to become a mere miracle-worker, in order that the people might be impressed by spectacular displays of supernatural power.

"Cast Thyself down," said the tempter. It may be, as some have affirmed, that the Jews in our Lord's time cherished the belief that the Messiah was to be revealed to Israel in a way like to that which the devil proposed. If our Lord had flung Himself down, had been upborne by angel hands, and had stood by the great altar where the people were gathered for the morning sacrifice, it is possible that they would have acclaimed Him the Anointed of

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God. But what would such faith be worth? There would be in it no sorrow for sin, no longing for holiness, no endeavour after new obedience. If later, on the mountain-side, He had received from the multitude who “craved for bread and nothing else” the crown and throne of David, what manner of royalty would this have been for Him who came to save His people from their sins? Or, again, if He had submitted to the subtle machinations of the priestly party, had infused into the nation a militant patriotism, and had precipitated a revolt against the might and majesty of Rome, how would this beseem Him who came to shed no blood but His own? “Move along the plane of least resistance,” says the tempter; “use the tools that lie to Your hands; make the best of existing conditions; compromise.” Jesus answers: “It is written, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.”

(c) The third and last temptation goes out to the uttermost parts of the earth. These had been promised to the Messiah by the Father from of old. Now Satan assumes the right of governance, saying, in full view of the wealth and dominion of earth, “All these things will I give Thee, if Thou wilt fall down and worship me” (Matt. 4:9). If we think that this proposal is too outrageous to awaken anything but repulsion in the mind of the Master, let us remember that He Himself has stripped the glamour from this sin, revealing it to us in its native hideousness.

From the hill behind His home in Nazareth, our Lord would often look upon the ships of Tarshish, sailing out towards the Pillars of Hercules, or returning to Tyre and Sidon with precious consignments. He would watch the slow caravans coming from Mesopotamia, Sheba, and Damascus, and at times He would trace the march of Roman legionaries along the great north road. Already, in His boyhood, He had come to know something of the kingdoms of this world and their glory. And now, from this exceeding high mountain, He sees the flash of gold and the glitter of steel. He is made aware of exquisite harmonies and glorious artistic imaginings. He comes to know the craft of statesmanship, the advance of science, the range of philosophic thought. And Satan seems to say, “By these Thou shalt win the world.” The

force of the insolent demand that Jesus should recognize the suzerainty of the prince of evil lies, it may be, in the presumption that sin belongs to the nature of man, and may be expelled, nay, must be, by natural means. If, in the upward process of development, we have passed from the lowest forms of non-moral savagery, we must still proceed, it has been said, along that upward path, shedding the vestiges of a lower creation, and evolving righteousness and truth by persistent tracking of high ideals. But attractive as this scheme appears to many, it possesses two fatal flaws: it asserts that sin is native to the soul, and it denies the virtue of the Cross of Christ.

On the mountains of Quarantania, Jesus lifted up His eyes and saw the vision which Ezekiel had once beheld, which John the beloved was yet to see—"the frame of a city towards the south"; a city whose walls are salvation, whose gates are praise. Those gates are open continually, day and night, for there is no night there. And through the uplifted portals there streams a multitude that no man can number, arrayed in white robes, with palms in their hands, singing the new song of redeeming love, and pressing over the golden ways to the throne of God and the Lamb. And Jesus, turning from the tempter with the stern word, "Get thee behind Me, Satan," sets His face towards the hill of shame, still far away, but soon to be surmounted by a cross.

CHAPTER 4

All Prayer

St. Paul mentions “all prayer” as one of the weapons in the armoury of God (Eph. 6:18). Our Lord, it need hardly be said, engaged in all manner of prayer.

1. SOCIAL AND PUBLIC INTERCESSION

We may contemplate Him first as sharing in social and public intercession.

(a) We think of Him as uniting in worship with all the children of faith, as it is written: “In the midst of the congregation will I sing praise unto Thee” (Heb. 2:12). At the opening of His ministry He proceeded, “as His custom was” to the Nazareth synagogue. Sabbath after Sabbath, He associated Himself in prayer and thanksgiving with all the men and women of good will who met there for worship. Afterward, in the temple and at the ritual feasts, He would certainly join in the services of the law. In His opening manhood, as the responsibilities of life were claiming His peculiar care, He reminded His parents of His duty as an Israelite: “Wist ye not that I must be in My Father’s house?” (Luke 2:49). In His inaugural mission to Jerusalem He described the temple as a house of prayer for all nations. When, after His departure, His disciples were continually in the temple giving thanks to God, it is probable that they were to some extent influenced by their Master’s example.

In one respect, as we have already said, His prayers would not be in unison with those of other worshippers—He knew no sin; He had no

personal confession to present. Yet He was even then, in the eternal decree, bearing the guilt of men—Sin-bearer for the race. In His intercession He was already taking upon Himself our trespass; as the Mediator He accepted responsibility for the sins of the whole world.

(b) It is evident also that our Lord was accustomed to unite with His disciples in a common supplication. They and He, for example, would join in the “Thanksgiving for the breaking of bread” at the daily meal. On the mountain-side, according to His wont, He blessed the Giver of all good, as He took into His hands the meagre supplies that were to be increased to meet the needs of the many (John 6:11). At the Supper-table He, as Ruler of the Feast, “gave thanks” (Luke 22:17, 19). This act of worship may have been in addition to the form of words prescribed for use at the Passover. We may think of it as a fervent outpouring of spirit, as the Scottish paraphrase suggests:

And after thanks and glory given
 To Him that rules in earth and heaven,
 That symbol of His flesh He broke,
 And thus to all His followers spoke.

The prayer which closed the Paschal celebration was, as we know, one that rose immeasurably above the ritual of the festival. It is recorded, for our admonition and strengthening in love, in the seventeenth chapter of the Gospel according to St. John. It is, if we may use the phrase, a high example of the “family worship” with which our Lord and His disciples were wont to close the day.

(c) But this prayer was, in addition, a priestly act. Although He was not of the lineage of Aaron, our Lord was, upon earth, one chosen from among men in things pertaining to God. As in Ephraim He had taken the little children in His arms, laying His hands on them as He made intercession on their behalf, so, in the valley of the Kidron, He blesses with uplifted hands the Church which He is about to purchase with His blood: “I pray for those whom Thou hast given Me . . . neither for these only do I pray,

but for them also that believe on Me through their word . . . that the world may believe that thou didst send Me” (John 17). This is the only sustained prayer of Christ which has been given to us. As one has truly said: “We cannot thankfully enough wonder at and magnify the goodness of God, who has taken care that one of the prayers in which the Son of God poured out His heart to the Father should be so carefully communicated to us.” As we listen to those words of our Covenant-Surety, it is as if a door were opened in heaven, and we beheld the Lamb in the midst of the throne.

The last act of our Saviour’s ministry was in the power of an unchangeable priesthood: “He led them out until they were over against Bethany: and He lifted up His hands, and blessed them” (Luke 24:50). As He blessed them, He was parted from them, and was carried up into heaven. That unfinished blessing rests upon His Church today. The Amen will be uttered only on His return in the glory of the Father, apart from sin, unto salvation.

2. SOLITARY COMMUNINGS

Let us speak next of His solitary communings. Sometimes He went forth to pray “a great while before day” (Mark 1:35), at other times He outwatched the stars (Matt. 14:25), once at least He spent the entire night in supplication (Luke 6:12).

Cold mountains and the midnight air
Witnessed the fervour of His prayer.

He had much to say to the Father, much to hear.

Each of the Evangelists commemorates the prayer-life of Jesus, but it is St. Luke who brings it before us in the fullest detail. The beloved physician may have learned something of the worth and power of prayer from St. Paul, his great-hearted travelling companion, who poured his life out in intercession, “night and day praying exceedingly” (1 Thess. 3:10). Because of that high example, St. Luke would be the more able to appreciate this aspect of the Lord’s service on our behalf.

THE PRAYER-LIFE OF OUR LORD

In Luke 5:16, we have a general statement which throws a vivid light on the daily practice of the Master: "And He withdrew Himself in the deserts, and prayed." It is not of one occasion, but of many, that the Evangelist speaks in this place. It was our Lord's habit to seek retirement for prayer; when He withdrew Himself from men, He was accustomed to press far into the uninhabited country—He was *in the deserts*. In this sentence the emphatic word is the pronoun "He." The surprise of the onlookers lay in this, that One so mighty, so richly endowed with spiritual power, should find it necessary for Himself to repair to the sources of strength, that there He might refresh His wearied spirit. To us the wonder is still greater—that He, the Prince of Life, the Eternal Word, the Only-begotten of the Father, should prostrate Himself in meekness before the throne of God, making entreaty for grace to help in every time of need. The only explanation to be given is that, in coming into manhood, He accepted life under those conditions to which our human nature has been subjected. He "came forth" from God, He "came down" among men, He "became poor" for our sakes (2 Cor. 8:9), He "emptied himself" of the dignities and splendours of Deity (Phil. 2:7).

Bordering on the Lake of Galilee there is a strip of uncultivated territory, termed "the mountain," a rough belt of untrimmed pasture-land, rising swiftly from the margin of the lake to the plateau above. Here our Lord often sought and found a sequestered spot, where He might hold uninterrupted communion with His Father.

The open air had a particular charm for Jesus. The intense simplicities of nature wrap the soul in silence, falling around one like the curtains of the sanctuary. In the glory of sunset, in the hush of a starlit evening, in the pallid pureness of the dawn, God seems to draw near: the clang of machinery no longer fills our ears; we hear His voice in the garden.

It is probable that our Lord, according to the Eastern mode (1 Sam. 1:13) was wont to offer prayer audibly. This is, I think, implied in Luke 11:1: "It came to pass, as He was praying in a certain place, that when He ceased, one of His disciples said unto Him, Lord, teach us to pray." The disciples, having

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drawn near, heard a solemn sound as of one praying: they stood, hushed in reverence, until He rose and joined them.

But there was a still deeper need for solitude in the hour of prayer. Prayer is our entrance into the secret place, where our Father seeth (Matt. 6:6).

Both by word and by example, the Lord Jesus impressed upon His disciples the importance of solitude in prayer. At one time He enters the tiny store-chamber and shuts the door (Matt. 6:6), at another He makes His way toward a solitary place (Mark 1:35); again, He ascends the hill-scarp (Mark 6:46) or the high mountain (Luke 9:28), and often He leaves the city behind Him and finds an oratory in the Olive Garden (Luke 22:39).

We have reason to believe that He frequently united in prayer with His disciples, but we read that often at such times He would withdraw from them. He called His disciples apart to Caesarea Philippi, to inform them that His rejection by the rulers of Israel had been determined on, and that His death was at hand; in that place they seem to have spent a week in prayerful retreat, yet even there He separated Himself from them: "It came to pass as He was praying alone, the disciples were with Him" (Luke 9:18)—alone, even then. And as they proceeded on the last journey to the City of the Great King, "They were in the way going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was going before them; and they were amazed; and as they followed, they were afraid. And He took again the twelve, and began to tell them the things that were to happen unto Him" (Mark 10:32). Once more, on the night of His betrayal and arrest, after He had offered the High-Priestly prayer in the audience of His disciples, He withdrew from them. To the eight He said, "Sit ye here, while I go yonder and pray" (Matt. 26:36); then, leaving the favoured three, He went a little farther into the sombre wood (v. 39) and fell on His face and prayed.

It is difficult for many of the Lord's children to find privacy for prayer, and into such an experience He Himself has entered. In the days of His youth He was one of a large family, crowded into a little cottage. Amid the vicissitudes of His ministry He was in journeyings oft, lodging perhaps in

the wayside khans. He was frequently the guest of those whose opportunities of offering a place for retirement in prayer were severely restricted; at other times His hosts were careless of His needs. But always He sought means for private prayer.

Instinctively, as well as in accordance with habit, we close our eyes when we pray. This attitude is the outward sign of inward recollection. We shut out from our view the world of sense, so that we may concentrate thought on that which is unseen and eternal. The intrusion of ordinary interests would confuse our mind, the presence of even our dearest friend would prevent the closing in upon us of the powers of the world to come. In abstraction from all that is created, we come to realise the essential things of the spirit.

3. SILENT PRAYER

In the silence God has much to say to us. He comes to search and try, to throw illumination into the dark places of our nature, to discover what of secret and undiscovered sin may be in us, to reveal to us His holiness, justice, and love, and to bring us into a rejoicing harmony with His thrice-blessed will.

In the presence of others the Saviour seems often to have been immersed in the prayer of silence.

When the woman of Canaan besought Him on behalf of her daughter, He answered her not a word (Matt. 15:23). It has been suggested that, as her request would have carried Him beyond His commission—"I am not sent but to the lost sheep of the house of Israel"—He "telegraphed home for instructions": hence His momentary silence.

When the man who was deaf and had an impediment in his speech was brought to Jesus, our Lord, looking up to heaven, sighed, and said, "*Ephphatha*". The look was prayer, the sigh also, then followed the word of power. The word so spoken rang in Simon's memory: he felt that no translation could worthily render it. In relating this incident to his catechumens, even to those whose familiar speech was Greek, he felt himself impelled

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to give the word precisely as Jesus uttered it. Accordingly, it stands in the original Aramaic in the Gospel which John Mark wrote under the guidance of Simon Peter (Mark 7:34).

When, on His return from Peraea, the Lord came to Bethany, His purpose was not only to comfort the sorrowing sisters, but to raise their brother from the dead. For power to effect this He prayed. We learn only incidentally of this silent supplication: when the Lord drew near to the sepulchre, He lifted up His eyes to heaven and said: "Father, I thank Thee that Thou heardest Me" (past tense, John 11:41). May we not believe that, as soon as the appeal to mercy reached His ears (11:3), there was a swift uplifting of His heart to the Father and an answering gift of power? His unspoken prayer has been accepted; and now there is open acknowledgement before the people.

When the seventy evangelists returned to Jesus and told Him of their spiritual successes, told Him also of the antagonisms which they had encountered, "He rejoiced in the Holy Spirit"; then broke forth in thanksgiving. In those words of praise He seems to refer to prayer offered for them during their absence: "I beheld Satan as lightning fallen from heaven" (Luke 10:17-24).

The Evangelists relate that on the morning of the second day of Passion Week our Lord, as He passed by, spoke to the barren fig tree, and immediately it withered away. Next morning the disciples drew His attention to the drooping leaves, and Jesus, taking the fruitless tree as His text, read them a lesson on prayer, earnest and believing. We may judge that His words of doom to the pretentious but barren fig tree were uttered after a silent communication had been addressed to His Father.

No mention is made of prayer in Mark 10:32, but we are constrained to think of it: "And they were in the way, going up to Jerusalem; and Jesus was going before them: and they were amazed; and they that followed were afraid." Our Lord is advancing, to meet and break the power of hell. All His faculties are concentrated on the work which His Father has given Him to do. His face is "set like a flint," He quickens His steps, the disciples fall behind,

shaken to consternation, stung with fear. Was there not in the mind of our Lord on that crowded pilgrim way a prelude to the Gethsemane agony?

We cannot but believe that an incessant stream of prayer flowed upward from the heart of the Man of Sorrows during the course of His ministry. Again and again it breaks forth in arrow-flights of prayer and ejaculatory thanksgivings.

Indeed, we are certain that, in the nature of things, it must have been so. Our Lord is foreshown in the experiences of the saintly life commemorated in the Old Testament, as when it is said in the Psalter: "I am prayer" (Ps. 109:4), and in the Prophets: "He wakeneth morning by morning. He wakeneth mine ear to hear as they that are taught" (Isa. 1:4). In the Gospels this continual intercourse with the Father is plainly asserted in many passages: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, The Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He seeth the Father doing: for what things soever He doeth, these the Son doeth in like manner. . . . I can of Myself do nothing: as I hear, I judge. . . . I do nothing of Myself; but as the Father taught Me, I speak these things. . . . I speak the things which I have seen with My Father" (John 5:19, 30; 8:28, 38).

So undeviating was this fellowship of spirit between the Father and the Son that we read in one passage of "the Son of Man which is in heaven" (John 3:13). On earth He had nowhere to lay His head; His home was in heaven. More than once the Saviour speaks of Himself as having, during His earthly sojourn, His dwelling in the Presence-chamber of God: "If any man serve Me, let him follow Me; and where I am, there shall also My servant be. . . . I come again, and will receive you unto Myself; that where I am, there ye may be also. . . . Father, that which Thou hast given Me, I will that, where I am, they also may be with Me" (John 12:26; 14:3; 17:24).