

~Other Speakers M-R: Thomas Reade:

## 66. A SABBATH MEDITATION

"I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day." Rev. 1:10

"How lovely is your dwelling place, O Lord Almighty." Psalm 84:1

I bless you, Oh! Lord, for the return of this holy day. When retired from the world and all its vanities, I can contemplate the glorious truths of your gospel, and listen to that still small voice, which is seldom heard amid the pleasures, companies, and cares of a world which lies in wickedness.

Often have I thought upon the evil of sin, both in its nature and effects; but give me, in mercy, a deeper view, and a greater abhorrence of it. Destroy its reigning power in my heart. Enable me to resist its rebellions, to subdue its lustings, until death shall end the warfare, and conduct me to the realms of peace.

I learn the malignity of sin at the cross of Christ. Was Jesus the beloved of the Father? Was he "daily his delight, rejoicing always before him?" Was he the eternal Son of God, "one with the Father?" He was; and yet, if he will undertake for sinners, he must stand in their place; if he will become their surety, he must smart for it. All their sins must meet upon him. He must bear the punishment due unto them. Though the delight and joy of the Father, yet, if he will become their bondsman, divine justice cannot release him, until he has paid the uttermost farthing.

How terrible to the sinner is the righteousness of Jehovah. Oh! my soul, what must become of you, if you are not in Christ; if all this wrath must fall on you? The forgiveness of the least sin, (esteemed least by men,) can only be procured by the blood of God incarnate! "Without shedding of blood is no remission." "We have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins."

From this day forth, may I have grace never to trifle with sin; never to cherish any sin under the false notion that it is a little one. To have the smallest transgression forgiven, Christ must die! The blood of Jesus Christ and nothing else, cleanses from all sin. How then can I escape, if I neglect so great salvation? If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me," though I make many formal prayers, practice many austerities, and go through a round of ceremonies. I may do many things, and apply to many physicians, but all will prove unavailing, if I neglect to go in faith to the Cross of Christ.

Give me grace, O God, to guard against positive evil; yes, to abstain, even from the appearance of it; to watch against and suppress the first motions of sin in the heart; and to avoid everything that might prove an inlet to it, or have a tendency towards it. Give me grace never to do that, of which the lawfulness is dubious; for "whatever is not of faith is sin." May I not only ascertain the lawfulness of an action but also its expediency, lest, by not attending to this Apostolic rule, I should become an occasion of sin to others, by emboldening them to do that which, though lawful to me, is contrary to the conscience of a weaker brother. "All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient," was the judgment of Paul. Give me grace to be circumspect in all my ways; to walk in wisdom towards those who are without; to redeem the time, because the days are evil.

This day I have been in the house of God; the place where his honor dwells. I have joined with the congregation in praising God, and in hearing the glad tidings of salvation. But, Oh! my soul, how have these services been performed? What sincerity has there been in your prayers; what fervency in your praises; what faith in listening to the words of eternal life? Lord! I am ashamed when I reflect on the wretched offering I have this day presented unto you; an offering so lowly, so full of blemishes, so unworthy the acceptance of the Majesty of heaven. "When you give blind animals as sacrifices, isn't that wrong? And isn't it wrong to offer animals that are crippled and diseased? Try giving gifts like that to your governor, and see how pleased he is! says the Lord Almighty." Alas! how often do I fall under this condemnation. Yet, Oh! all-gracious Father, accept my sacrifice of prayer and praise, defective as it is, through the all-perfect sacrifice of your beloved Son, who died upon the cross for me. I offer myself and all that I am, upon the altar of his cross, that I may henceforth be a living sacrifice, devoted unto you, body, soul, and spirit, which is my reasonable service. May all My hopes of pardon rest on the atonement of your dear Son; all my peace be drawn from his obedience unto death, all my joy spring from the assurance that he ever lives to make intercession for me.

The more I know of myself, the more I find cause for deeper humiliation. The more I know of my duty to you, the more I am convinced that I am an unprofitable servant. The more I know of your Majesty, Glory, Greatness,

Holiness, and Justice, the more I am persuaded that no man can be justified in your presence. The more I reflect upon my holiest services, the more I discover of their imperfection and sinfulness.

Blessed Jesus! how lovely, how endearing do you appear, as the Lord my Righteousness. Oh! clothe me in this garment of salvation; that, being accepted in you, I may experience your Father's love; the Holy Spirit's consolation, and stand with "boldness in the day of judgment." Seal this blessing to my heart, through your sanctifying grace; then shall I have the witness in myself, that I am born from above.

While I remain in this earthly tabernacle, Oh! Almighty Savior, spiritualize my affections. Give me a heart to love you, to delight itself in you. Take away all relish for earthly, sinful pleasures. Sanctify all my enjoyments of creature comforts, by never forgetting you in them, nor losing the sight of your glory in the use of them. Let all my faculties and powers be consecrated unto you who made them. And let me praise you, blessed Lord, while life and being last.

It is comparatively easy to live in the form of godliness. To attend the service of the sanctuary, to pray in private and in the family, to read the Scriptures, to associate with religious people, to talk about religion, and to give alms to the poor, are duties which may be performed, though the heart may not be right with God. These things must be done to maintain the Christian character, as is evident from the word of God. "Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is." "When you pray, enter into your closet." "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." "Search the Scriptures." "I am a companion of all those who do not fear." "Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer every man." "You shall open your hand wide unto your brother, to your poor, and to your needy, in the land."

But experience affords abundant proof, that all this may be done from a principle of self-righteousness; from a principle of vainglory; from a desire to be seen of men, and to obtain a name.

To ascertain my real character, I must look into the heart. Do I labor to perform these outward duties with a single eye to the favor and glory of God? Am I more anxious about unseen duties, remembering the words of Hagar; "You God see me." The flame of vainglory, which is kindled by the pride of fallen nature, is fanned and increased by the suggestions of Satan, and kept alive by the praises of men. O! how difficult it is, to keep down this unhallowed fire. Even when we think it is quenched, it is still smoldering beneath the embers, ready to burst forth at the least blast of Satan's temptations.

Let me, then, look within. Do I strive to keep my heart with all diligence, from every impure thought; from every idle imagination; from all irregular passions and desires; from all evil affections and lusts? Do I study to maintain a conscience void of offence towards God, as well as man? Am I continually watching over the motions of the mind, the rapid flights of fancy, that the enemy may not rush into my heart by some unguarded avenue; or find me sleeping at my post?

Conscious of my utter inability to help myself, am I daily, yes, constantly, looking unto Jesus for grace and strength, to mortify the flesh, and to cherish the influences of the Spirit?

If, while diligently performing the outward duties of the gospel, I am unwearied in cultivating inward sanctity, then, I possess an evidence of being renewed in the spirit of my mind, and may draw near to God, through Christ, with filial confidence. But, if my religion be confined to forms and ceremonies, coldly performed, from education or custom, I am a self-deceiver; and should I knock at the closed door, saying, Lord, open unto me; the answer would be, as to the foolish virgins, "I know you not."

O! Shepherd of your chosen flock, grant that the outward call of your word may be accompanied by the inward call of your Spirit. Then shall I be stirred up to call earnestly upon you, to seek you in all the means of grace, to pant after you, as the deer pants for the water brooks. Then will my interest in you be unclouded; my peace, through faith in your righteousness, be secured; for all your redeemed ones are the purchase of your blood, given to you by the Father; chosen in you before the foundation of the world; called in time, and preserved unto eternal glory. None of the tribulations of this evil world can separate their love from you, and no created power can separate your love from them.

O! blessed bond of union, cemented by your blood; their salvation is sure; their names are written in heaven; they are engraved on your heart; they are yours, and none shall pluck them out of your hands. Such is the blessedness, the security of the sheep of your pasture. You have said, "I am the good shepherd; I know my own sheep, and they know me. My sheep recognize my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal

life, and they will never perish. No one will snatch them away from me."

Are you Wisdom? They are taught of you, and made wise unto salvation. They are guided into all truth.

Are you Power? They are strengthened with might by your Spirit in the inner man; and made more than conquerors over sin and Satan.

Are you Goodness? They daily partake of its blessings; inviting others to taste and see how gracious the Lord is.

Are you Faithfulness and Truth? This is the Rock on which they build; and, being grounded and settled in your Truth, can triumph over all their foes. "Those who know your name will put their trust in you; for you, Lord, have not forsaken those who seek you."

Are you Righteousness? This is their glorious dress, in which arrayed, they can appear before the throne, with holy boldness, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.

Are you Holiness? By this, they are made like unto You, being sanctified in body, soul, and spirit. They bear your image in righteousness and true holiness. They are beautified with your salvation; and made "a peculiar people, zealous of good works."

Are you Mercy? This is their rejoicing and song of praise. Your grace is the theme of their thanksgiving. "Who is a God like you, who pardons iniquity, and passes by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage? he retains not his anger forever, because he delights in mercy" "Let them now that fear the Lord say, that his mercy endures forever."

Are you Love? Oh! how great is your people's joy. They love you, because you have first loved them. They love you, because with loving-kindness you have drawn them. They love you, because you have shed abroad your love in their hearts by the Holy Spirit, who is given unto them. Their language is, "By grace are we saved. By grace we are what we are. To grace be all the praise."

Are you a Prophet, Priest, and King; a Redeemer, Advocate, and Intercessor? In all these offices and characters they admire and love you. You are the Lord their God; their Portion; their All in All.

Do you feel, O my soul, this love to the Savior; this faith and hope? Is he precious to you, the chief of ten thousand, the altogether lovely One? Is he your beloved and your friend? Then rejoice; this comes from the Lord; this flows from the fountain of his Sovereign love. Rejoice, and look across this narrow span of time, to the boundless regions of eternity. There, in the world of glory, shall all the chosen flock, redeemed by his blood, surround the throne of Jesus, and swell with countless myriads, the chorus of his praise.

Oh! while life shall last, admire this free, this rich, this undeserved mercy. Lie low before him in humility. Rise high in gratitude. Never cease to love, until the pure flame shall reach the source from where it came. There it will burn with inextinguishable blaze, to the glory of the Triune Jehovah!

Sweet is the day of holy rest,  
 To souls renewed by love divine;  
 They lean as on the Savior's breast;  
 Like Moses, on the Mount, they shine.  
 The Savior's mild reflected grace,  
 Gives witness to their peace within;  
 While they, with arms of faith, embrace,  
 The Great Atonement made for sin.  
 With joy, they hear the Gospel sound,  
 With pure devotion, join in prayer;  
 They praise the Savior they have found,  
 And all his mercies richly share.  
 The sacred Sabbath of their Lord,  
 They love the best of all the seven;  
 With saints unite in one accord,  
 And antedate the bliss of heaven.  
 O that with them, I thus may love  
 The consecrated House of Prayer  
 Then fly to purer realms above,  
 And praise my Savior ever there.