

J.C. Ryle:

"Now in the morning, having risen a long while before daylight, he went out and departed to a solitary place; and there he prayed. Simon and those who were with him searched for him. When they found him, they said, to him, 'Everyone is looking for you.' But he said to them, 'Let us go into the next towns, that I may preach there also, because for this purpose I have come forth.' And he was preaching in their synagogues throughout all Galilee, and casting out demons." (Mark 1:35-39)

Every fact in our Lord's life on earth, and every word which fell from his lips, ought to be deeply interesting to a true Christian. We see a fact and a saying in the passage we have just read which deserve close attention.

We see, for one thing, an example of our Lord Jesus Christ's habits about private prayer. We are told, that "in the morning, rising up a great while before day, he went out and departed into a solitary place, and there prayed." We shall find the same thing often recorded of our Lord in the Gospel history. When he was baptized, we are told that he was "praying." When he was transfigured, we are told that "as he prayed, the fashion of his face was altered." Before he chose the twelve apostles, we are told that "He continued all night in prayer to God." When all men spoke well of him and would fain have made him a King, we are told that "He went up into a mountain apart to pray." When tempted in the garden of Gethsemane, he said, "Sit ye here, while I shall pray." In short, our Lord prayed always, and did not faint. Sinless as he was, he set us an example of diligent communion with his Father. His Godhead did not render him independent of the use of all means as a man. His very perfection was a perfection kept up through the exercise of prayer.

We ought to see in all this the immense importance of private devotion. If he who was "holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners," thus prayed continually, how much more ought we who are compassed with infirmity? If he found it needful to offer up supplications with strong crying and tears, how much more needful is it for us, who in many things offend daily?

What shall we say to those who never pray at all, in the face of such a passage as this? There are many such, it may be feared, in the list of baptized people--many who rise up in the morning without prayer, and without prayer lie down at night--many who never speak one word to God. Are they Christians? It is impossible to say so. A praying Master, like Jesus, can have no prayerless servants. The Spirit of adoption will always make a man call upon God. To be prayerless is to be Christless, Godless, and in the high road to destruction. What shall we say to those who pray, yet give but little time to their prayers? We are obliged to say that they show at present very little of the mind of Christ. Asking little, they must expect to have little. Seeking little, they cannot be surprised if they possess little. It will always be found that when prayers are few, grace, strength, peace, and hope are small.

We shall do well to watch our habits of prayer with a holy watchfulness. Here is the pulse of our Christianity. Here is the true test of our state before God. Here true religion begins in the soul, when it does begin. Here it decays and goes backward, when a man backslides from God. Let us walk in the steps of our blessed Master in this respect as well as in every other. Like him, let us be diligent in our private devotion. Let us know what it is to "depart into solitary places and pray."

We see, for another thing, in this passage, a remarkable saying of our Lord as to the purpose for which he came into the world. We find him saying, "Let us go into the next town, that I may preach there also: for therefore came I forth."

The meaning of these words is plain and unmistakeable. Our Lord declares that he came on earth to be a preacher and a teacher. He came to fulfill the prophetic office, to be the "prophet greater than Moses," who had been so long foretold. He left the glory which he had from all eternity with the Father to do the work of an evangelist. He came down to earth to show to man the way of peace, to proclaim deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind. One principal part of his work on earth was to go up and down and publish glad tidings, to offer healing to the broken-hearted, light to them that sat in darkness, and pardon to the chief of sinners.

We ought to observe here what infinite honor the Lord Jesus puts on the office of the preacher. It is an office which the eternal Son of God himself undertook. He might have spent his earthly ministry in instituting and keeping up ceremonies, like Aaron. He might have ruled and reigned as a king, like David. But he chose a different calling. Until the time when he died as a sacrifice for our sins, his daily, and almost hourly work was to preach.

## A Praying Saviour

Let us never be moved by those who cry down the preacher's office, and tell us that sacraments and other ordinances are of more importance than sermons. Let us give to every part of God's public worship its proper place and honor, but let us beware of placing any part of it above preaching. By preaching, the Church of Christ was first gathered together and founded, and by preaching, it has ever been maintained in health and prosperity. By preaching, sinners are awakened. By preaching, inquirers are led on. By preaching, saints are built up. By preaching, Christianity is being carried to the heathen world.

There are many now who sneer at missionaries, and mock at those who go out into the highways of our own land to preach to crowds in the open air. But such persons would do well to pause and consider calmly what they are doing. The very work which they ridicule is the work which turned the world upside down, and cast heathenism to the ground. Above all, it is the very work which Christ himself undertook. The King of kings and Lord of lords himself was once a preacher. For three long years he went to and fro proclaiming the Gospel. Sometimes we see him in a house, sometimes on the mountain side, sometimes in a Jewish synagogue, sometimes in a boat on the sea. But the great work he took up was always one and the same. He came always preaching and teaching.

Let us leave this passage with a solemn resolution never to "despise prophesying." The minister we hear may not be highly gifted. The sermons that we listen to may be weak and poor. But after all, preaching is God's grand ordinance for converting and saving souls. The faithful preacher of the Gospel is handling the very weapon which the Son of God was not ashamed to employ.