

Devotional Service

BY REV. T. J. PARR, M.A.

MARCH 20.—"THE PRAYER LIFE OF CHRIST."

Luke 5: 16; Luke 11, 1; John 11, 41-42; Matt. 26: 36-29

When we know what time Christ spent in prayer, and how the great events of his life were all connected with special prayer, says Murray, we learn the necessity of absolute dependence on, and unceasing direct communication with the heavenly world, if we are to live a heavenly life, or to exercise heavenly power around us. We see how foolish and fruitless the attempt must be to work for God and heaven, without, in the first place, in prayer, getting the life and the power of heaven to possess us. Unless this truth lives in us, we cannot avail ourselves a right of the mighty power of the name of Christ. His example must teach us and ever be before us.

BACK TO PRAYER.

It is to be feared that the prayer-life of many professing Christians is waning. And when the prayer-life wanes, the entire Christian life wanes and dwindles. Christ prayed much. If any one could have been satisfied with always living and working in the spirit of prayer, it would have been our Master. But he could not. He needed to have his supplies replenished by continued and long-continued seasons of prayer.

CHOOSING APOSTLES.

Of the night before choosing his Apostles we read (Luke 6, 12), "He went out into the night to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God." The first step toward the constitution of the Church, and the separation of men to be his witnesses and successors, called him to special and long continued prayer. All had to be done according to the pattern on the mount. "The Son can do nothing of himself; the Father showeth him all things that himself doeth." It was in the night of prayer it was shown him.

TO MAKE HIM KING.

In the night between the feeding of the five thousand when Jesus knew that they wanted to take him by force and make him king, and the walking on the sea, "He withdrew again into the mountain, himself alone to pray." (Matt. 14, 23; Mark 6, 46; John 6, 15.) It was God's will he was come to do, and God's power he was to show forth. He had it not as a possession of his own; it had to be prayed for and received from above.

A PRAYING LIFE.

The introduction to the story of the Transfiguration is, "He went up into the mountain to pray." (Luke 9, 28.) The request of his disciple, "Lord teach us to pray" (Luke 11, 1), follows after the statement, "It came to pass as he was praying in a certain place." In his own personal life, continues Murray, in his intercourse with the Father, in all he is and does for men, the Christ whose name we are to use, is a man of prayer. It is prayer that gives him his power of blessing and transfigures this very body with the glory of heaven. It is his own prayer-life that makes him the teacher of others how to pray. How much more must it be prayer, much prayer, prayer alone, that can fit us to share his glory of a transfigured life, or make us the channel of heavenly blessing and teaching to others.

THE END DRAWS NEAR.

As the end approaches, it is still more prayer. When the Greeks ask to see him, and he spoke of his approaching

death, he prayed. At Lazarus' grave, he prayed. In the last night he prayed his prayer as our High-priest, that we might know what his sacrifice would win, and what his everlasting intercession on the throne would be. In Gethsemane he prayed his prayer as the Lamb slain for the salvation of the world. On the cross, it is still prayer—the prayer of compassion for his murderers; the prayer of atoning suffering in the thick darkness; the prayer in death of confiding resignation of his spirit to the Father.

CHRIST, OUR TEACHER.

All Christ's teaching was just the revelation of how he lived, and of the life he was to live in us. His teaching of the disciples was first to awaken desire, and so prepare them for what he would by the Holy Spirit work in them. Let us believe that all he was in prayer, and all he taught, he himself will give. He came to fulfil the law; much more will he fulfil the Gospel in all he taught us, as to what to pray for and how.

(a) What to Pray.—It has been said by some that direct petitions, as compared with the exercise of fellowship with God, are but a subordinate part of prayer. If we carefully study all that our Lord spoke of prayer we shall see that this is not his teaching. In the Lord's prayer, in the parables on prayer, in the illustration of the child asking bread, in seeking and knocking, in the oft-repeated "Whatsoever" of the last evening—everywhere our Lord urges and encourages us to offer definite petitions and to expect definite answers. There can be no truer fellowship with God than these definite petitions, and their answers by which we become the channel of God's grace and life to men.

(b) How to Pray.—Our Lord taught us to pray in secret, in simplicity, with the eye on God alone, in humility, in the spirit of forgiving love. But the chief truth he reiterated was ever this: To pray in faith. And he defined faith, not only as a trust in God's goodness or power, but as the definite assurance that we shall receive the things asked for. And, then, in view of the delay in the answer, he insisted on perseverance and urgency. We must be followers of those "who through faith and patience inherit the promises," the faith that accepts the promise, and the patience that inherits the blessing.

HELPFUL HINTS.

1. Christ's life was one marked by prayer as one of its most real and natural experiences.
2. Christ's love of the Father showed itself in his eagerness to be alone with him in prayer.
3. Christ began his days with God and so continued and ended them.
4. If he bade men to pray always and not to faint, that was what he did himself.
5. For Christ's time habits in prayer see, Mark 1, 35; Mark 6, 45-47. For his place habits in prayer see, John 18, 2; Luke 5, 16; Luke 6, 12.
6. Christ prepared for the great events of his life by prayer: Matt. 14, 23-33; Luke 6, 12, 13; Luke 9, 18, 20. He followed the great events of his life by prayer: Matt. 14, 23; Mark 1, 32, 35; Luke 3, 22.
7. Prayer was his very breath. (a) Unselfish prayer, Luke 22, 32. (b) Forgiving prayer, Luke 23, 34. (c) Earnest prayer, Luke 22, 44. (d) Submissive prayer, Matt. 11, 26.

POINTS FOR THE PRESIDENT.

Seek to put first things first. Christ puts prayer in the believers' life as of first importance. Do we? Impress this fundamental truth on the meeting. You will find a full treatment of this subject in the foregoing. Use it to the best advantage. You will get much suggestion

in the "Helpful Hints." Arrange things so that everyone takes part in the study of the topic. Use much Scripture reference. After topic study, spend remainder of time in prayer service. Oh, that this great theme may take hold of the young believers in Methodism! What new spiritual life, what increased service, would result in all our Leagues.

MARCH 27.—"OUR MISSION IN WEST CHINA. OCCUPATION OF THE FIELD."

In our study of the Canadian Methodist Mission in West China, we get to the first convert and the establishment of the work among the Chinese.

CHOLERA.

Cholera was raging in Chentu when our missionaries arrived, and they were therefore, compelled for safety to flee to the mountains fifty-five miles away. Here they lived for a month in a large Taoist temple. They thus had the opportunity of studying heathenism from the inside view. In this temple were forty-eight idols, ranging from eight inches to eight feet in height. They were in all kinds of postures, sitting, standing, flying, and were all hideously ugly. Some had horse-hair heads stuck to their faces. Three priests conducted the worship of the gods every morning at dawn, and again at dusk. This service consisted of a great deal of bowing, the placing of incense sticks before each idol, and the pounding of drums and gongs.

A STRANGE CONTRAST.

It was a strange picture that of the little company of devout men and women lifting their hearts and voices to the one true and living God in the midst of grim, heathen idols staring down upon them. To quote from a letter from Dr. Kilborn: "No objection whatever has been made to our daily worship. We sing Christian hymns, read our Bibles, and our men not to worship idols, and pray to God, all in the large room containing nearly twenty idols. Sick people begin to come for medicine. Each one treated seems to send two or three more. We have treated over one hundred patients in a little over a month. We are of course not yet able to say much to them about the Gospel, but we have presented them with books and tracts, and we know for a certainty that we have won the goodwill of a great many in this vicinity. They will listen readily sometime in the future to us or someone else who may go to preach to them."

THE RETURN.

After six weeks in the mountains our missionaries considered it safe to return to Chentu. Soon a medical dispensary was opened. On the first day eighteen patients were treated in the forenoon. Twice a week the two doctors worked from morning till night in the dispensary, while on other days they were kept busy with paying patients at outside work. About this time a reading-room was opened in the front of the house, and immediately it became the centre of interest to the Chinese. All day the room was thronged with well-dressed, intelligent people, who were interested in the tracts and books for sale. During the first year over two thousand small books and calendars were sold, while the number who read but did not buy, was very great. Then a day school was opened and by the end of the first month over forty pupils were registered. These were taught to sing Christian hymns, and were instructed in the knowledge of the Christian faith. Preaching was done on Sunday, and on other week days, and the people were very friendly and interested and the prospects were very bright.