

Sunday, October 29, 2023 pm

SERMONS FROM SONGS

Sweet Hour of Prayer

#73, Hymns for Worship

Tonight, we want to examine another song that we sing from time to time. The song I have chosen for this evening is "Sweet Hour of Prayer". This song is a powerful reminder that prayer ought to be an important part of our Christian lives. And as we sing this song we are reminding ourselves of this spiritual discipline.

This song is attributed to William W. Walford of England. While there is some discussion about who he is, the most prevalent account is that he was a blind minister who had a great ability to memorize and quote scripture in his lessons. He spoke the words to this hymn as a poem to Thomas Salmon who brought it to America where it was published in 1845 by The Observer, a weekly British publication. It was put to music later by William Bradbury in 1861. Bradbury is an accomplished composer who also gave us the music to "Jesus Loves Me", "He Leadeth Me", "Just As I Am", "Savior like a Shepherd Lead Us", and "The Solid Rock."

In preparing this song I came across an observation. This is a song that is not primarily about our public prayers. It is private prayers that we ought to be offering to God on a regular basis. But certainly, we also pray together which is also mentioned in this song.

I. Vs. 1 - Take time to pray

- a. **Sweet hour of prayer** – prayer is an important part of our lives as Christians.
 - i. We ought to be praying often - Colossians 4:2, 1 Thessalonians 5:17, Ephesians 6:18.
 - ii. It ought to be "**sweet**", something pleasant and that we look forward to. We ought to find comfort as we pray. And if we are praying with a proper attitude that will take place.
 - iii. **HOUR** – this indicates not only a specified time, but a degree of length. No where are we told how much we should pray, BUT we are told to pray often.
 - iv. Jesus taught that – Luke 18:1. He prayed often and at times for prolonged periods of time. Luke 5:16 tells us that He often prayed. Luke 6:12 notes that He continued all night in prayer.
 - v. Do we take time to pray regularly and with detail? Are we CAPABLE of praying long prayers?
- b. **That calls me from a world of care** – in the midst of busy world we ought to take time to pray.
 - i. We live in a busy world. If we are to keep our focus on God, it requires that we pause and think of Him. I heard about a man who one time told his preacher, "I'm too busy to pray." To which the preacher said, "Actually, because you are so busy, you cannot afford to NOT pray!" As the world is pressing us, we MUST take time to remember Him.
 - ii. Matthew 13:22 reminds us that the cares of this world can choke out the word and cause us to be unfruitful.
 - iii. Anyone who has lived any length of time knows that there are many problems in this world – BIG problems that we cannot fix ourselves. But God does care and He CAN do whatever He desires.
- c. **And bids me at my Father's throne, make all my wants and wishes known** – our prayers are to be directed toward God
 - i. Cf. Matthew 6:9 – how Jesus began the model prayer.
 - ii. 1 Peter 1:17, *And if you call on the Father, who without partiality judges according to each one's work, conduct yourselves throughout the time of your stay here in fear;*
 - iii. Make your desires known to Him – according to His will. 1 John 5:14-15, cf. James 4:3.
- d. **In seasons of distress and grief, my soul has often found relief** – James 5:13 – suffering, let him pray. Understand, God may not answer the way we want, but to the godly, there is consolation just in knowing that He hears us. Consider Paul's prayer in 2 Corinthians 12:7-10 for his "thorn in the flesh".

While not removed, “God grace” was sufficient for him. Similarly, Jesus praying in the Garden of Gethsemane. While God did not remove the cup, He comforted Him (Luke 22:41-46).

- e. **And oft escaped the tempter’s snare, by thy return sweet hour of prayer** – Matthew 6:13, Also Luke 22:46 – “Rise and pray, lest you enter into temptation.” When we are tempted we NEED to be praying!

II. Vs. 2 - Praying with anticipation

- a. **The joy I feel, the bliss I share** – it ought to be a pleasant time. Prayer should not be a chore. If it is, there is likely an obstacle.
 - i. As you pray do you have confidence in God? Romans 15:13, *Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.*
 - ii. Bliss is associated with joy. Note that this is shared. I cannot help but think of fellowship – with God and with one another. 1 John 1:3-4 – our fellowship is with the father which ought to result in fellowship with one another – 1 John 1:7.
 - iii. Prayer ought to be bond between brothers and sisters in Christ. We are also reminded in James 5:16 that we are to be praying for one another.
- b. **Of those whose anxious spirits burn with strong desires for Thy return** – I am reminded of our relationship with one another. If our hearts are rights, with one another we anticipate our Lord’s return. Philippians 3:20 – our citizenship is in heaven...; 2 Timothy 4:8 – when He appears we anticipate our reward together. It is the godly that desire the Lord to return.
- c. **With such I hasten to the place, where God my Savior shows His face** – with hope beyond this life.
 - i. I turn to God, knowing He is there and listening. God hears the prayers of the righteous – 1 Peter 3:12, *For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, And His ears are open to their prayers; But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.*
 - ii. I am also here reminded of my private prayers where God hears – Matthew 6:5-6 – Go to Him in your closet.
- d. **And gladly take my station there, and wait for thee...** – this will be a foundation of my faith. I need patience to let God answer in His time – James 5:7 calls for us to be patient as we wait on the Lord. Luke 18:7 after the parable of the persistent widow, Jesus notes that God will answer.

III. Prayers reaching to heaven

- a. **Thy wings shall my petition bear** – I know that God is listening. The whole idea of this expression points to our prayers reaching to heaven. 1 John 5:14-15 – He hears us. James 5:16 tells us that the effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.
- b. **To Him whose truth and faithfulness engage the waiting soul to bless** – this is descriptive of both God and Jesus. I am reminded that it is through Jesus that we approach God – Ephesians 2:18 – through Him we have access, John 14:13-14 – ask “in My name...” Furthermore, we are reminded that God is faithful – cf. 1 Corinthians 10:13, 1:9 – *God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.*
- c. **And since He bids me seek His face, believe His word and trust His grace** – In this I think of 2 things:
 - i. When I pray, do I believe that He can and will answer? James 1:5-8 – when we pray it must be with faith; 1 Timothy 2:8 – men pray everywhere... without doubting.
 - ii. Am striving to be compliant to His will AND I trust Him - 1 John 3:22 - *And whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight.*
- d. **And cast on Him my every care, and wait for thee, sweet hour of prayer** – we cast all our cares on Him because He cares for us. 1 Peter 5:7, Philippians 4:6-7. Again, we are called upon to WAIT!

There is a 4th verse. In our previous hymnal, “Sacred Selection” it was included (while vs. 2 of our current book was not). It was about our hope and persistence in prayer until we reach our home in heaven. It says:

Sweet hour of prayer, sweet hour of prayer; May I thy consolation share. Till from Mt. Pisgah's lofty height, I view my home and take my flight. This robe of flesh I'll drop, and rise to seize the everlasting prize. And shout while passing through the air, "Farewell, farewell, sweet hour of prayer."

And thus we see another song designed to teach and admonish one other. This time the emphasis is on our need for prayer. What about you? Do you pray as you should? Do you take time to pray on a regular basis? Think about it!