

THE KEY TO PUBLIC MINISTRY

Our greatest need, as gospel heralds, is to be men of prayer. I believe God desires to impresses us with this Biblical absolute: *if we do not pray, sooner or later, we will misrepresent God.* Jesus said...

Matthew 6:6 *But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly.*

Now, this we must know: *true gospel preaching is far more than intellectual communication. Mere words affect men's minds, but preaching is intended to expose the heart.* Some men speak to appeal solely to human reason, others seek to stir deep emotion, but the gospel preacher's aim is to awaken the human conscience.

2 Corinthians 4:2 *...by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.*

And thus, the gospel's influence is confirmed not by the sinner's feelings, nor by his preferences, or approval, but by his tormented conscience.

"All forms of sin and wickedness grow up and luxuriate under the eye and voice of preaching that never disturbs consciences nor awakens opposition. The preaching that has no repellent power will not have attractive force." -E.M. Bounds¹

Let the Church truly preach Christ and wicked men everywhere will confess...

Rev. 6:17 *For the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?*

Gospel preaching is divine utterance projected to strike at the moral center of man, supercharged with heart-piercing, Holy Ghost unction. However, let us understand: such utterance is completely beyond human origin or fabrication. Such preaching is not man speaking about God, it is God speaking through man.

¹ E.M. Bounds, *Powerful & Prayerful Pulpits.*

This, and this alone, constitutes preaching the gospel. If we fail here, we cannot fulfill the Great Commission.

1 Peter 1:12 ...preached the gospel unto you with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven.

Our obligation is to literally bring God and His Word into enemy territory. For sake of illustration, consider for a moment *Osama Bin Ladin*, who at this hour is perhaps one of the most notorious enemies of America. Would a mere photograph of *Mr. Bin Ladin* strike fear in your heart? Of course not, but what if he were to walk into the very room you occupy at this moment? No doubt, there would be a much stronger reaction. So it is with our obligation in presenting the gospel. We must, by the power of the Holy Ghost, unveil God, His Word, and His law to the conscience of the sinner. A mere caricature of God will not suffice. No, we must, through the supernatural declaration of God's Word, manifest the tangible character of the Almighty. Then, and then alone, will the mountains melt like wax. Then the apathetic, stone-cold hearts of careless sinners will be smitten with the reality of...

Hebrews 10:31 ...it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

What is the key to such divine utterance? I believe the answer is found in *Jesus'* words in our text: *persistent, fervent, believing prayer*. Apart from such supplication no Christian can be an effective witness for *Jesus*. I see three, simple, and obvious things communicated regarding such prayer in *Matthew 6:6*...

PRAYER IS A COMMAND, NOT AN OPTION

Matthew 6:6a But thou, when thou prayest...

Notice, *Jesus* said "when we pray," not "if we pray." We often hear Christianity described as a personal relationship with God the Father, through *Jesus Christ*, and so it is. And yet, who ever heard of a relationship void of communication. If I rarely spoke to my wife how could I refer to my marriage as healthy? We must be made to see, our first obligation as Christians is to know, love, and minister unto God. Throughout the *Book of Exodus* we read these words regarding the Priests...

Exodus 40:13 ...that he (they) may minister unto me.

If we have no heart to minister to Him, don't be deceived, we cannot truly have a heart to minister for Him. If we have little or nothing to say to God, we have little or nothing to say for Him.

Matthew 10:27 What I tell you in darkness, that speak ye in light: and what ye hear in the ear, that preach ye upon the housetops.

We cannot declare what we do not hear. Remember, articulate speech is impossible apart from the ability to hear. We must seek God to have His living Word for lost humanity. And yet, when the prayer meeting is laborious, when it's lost its appeal, when prayer is difficult, the question is not, "*am I qualified to evangelize?*" but rather, "*who will God send to evangelize me?*" Think about it: Jesus' sacrifice on Calvary made it possible for us to have communion with God, do we squander such a privilege? Do we preach to others, "*honor the cross,*" while we neglect its greatest blessing? What does "*reconciliation to God*" mean if it does not mean to be brought back into fellowship and communion with God? Furthermore, how can we reconcile sinners to a God we barely know? Sadly, I've come to learn, as a pastor, I'm often attempting to convince professing Christians to love a God they don't even like.

Moreover, we disesteem the command to pray at our own peril, for prayerlessness is sin. Jesus, in the *parable of the unjust judge*, communicates prayer as a command...

Luke 18:1 ...men ought always to pray, and not to faint.

NEXT, WHAT IS OUR SECRET HISTORY WITH GOD?

Matthew 6:6b ...enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret

"There are three persons living in each of us: the one we think we are, the one other people think we are, and the one God knows we are." -Leonard Ravenhill²

² Leonard Ravenhill, *Why Revival Tarries*.

What we are, in reality, is defined before God, in secret, at the altar of prayer. No one will escape this spiritual absolute. Thus, the man who desires to represent *Jesus Christ* in evangelism must see the utter necessity to establish a private altar before God. The man who neglects or shuns secret prayer will never be able to truly stir up the gift of God. Thus, if we fail in the ministry of prayer we will never be effective in a ministry of evangelism. A shunned altar essentially is the root of an empty heart. We must see, preaching doesn't hinge on eloquence or oratory skill, no, no, it stands or falls alone on the ground of the anointing. And we can never be anointed if we refuse to walk closely with God. I've worked with several different preachers, but without exception, all who had divine authority were men of prayer; and those who didn't, it was obvious, they somehow lightly esteemed prayer, or thought they could avoid or otherwise bypass the altar. Such men go on in their so-called ministry with little or no spiritual influence. Their preaching is often dry, clinical, and even rehearsed; preaching more from a head filled with knowledge rather than a heart filled with the Holy Ghost. Rather than a voice for God, they become an echo of the voice, mere purveyors of second-hand revelation. Sadly, having little hunger to seek God for the grace and discipline to pray, such men also lack the grace and discipline to live holy. Consequently, sin, compromise and spiritual ruin are generally their latter end.

Throughout the Scriptures we read declarations like...

Ezekiel 1:3 The word of the LORD came expressly unto Ezekiel...

We all sometime repeat others, but the very essence of God's call, demands He speak through us. The God-called preacher's heart burns with a personal Word from heaven, exclaiming with the *Apostle Paul*, "...necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel." He must speak, for God has spoken to him. He must tell, for God has told him. Moreover, the man called of God realizes early on, he must not rely on talent, knowledge, wit, or even zeal, but on the anointing of the Holy Ghost. To be sincere, honest, earnest, and even zealous is not enough, God's presence, power, and unction must be upon us. And the anointing, that blessed heavenly unction, is only secured in one place...

"Prayer, much prayer, is the price of preaching unction; prayer, much prayer, is the one, sole condition of keeping this unction. Without unceasing prayer, the

unction never comes to the preacher. Without perseverance in prayer, the unction, like the manna overkept, breeds worms." -E.M. Bounds³

One of the most difficult, yet essential, spiritual lessons we must learn is: *we are not God*. Apart from *Jesus*, without exception, we will be reckless and hopelessly dangerous. If we are going to plan to preach, we must also plan to pray. To do otherwise is to confess by our actions that we are adequate within ourselves to preach the gospel.

Proverbs 28:26 *He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool...*

May God deliver us from our blind, self-sufficiency: *we need to be bruised, crushed, and broken.*

FINALLY, A SECRET LIFE OF PRAYER WILL REAP OPEN REWARD

Matthew 6:6c *...and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly.*

The key to Biblical evangelism is a secret, prayer history with God: *a very personal, private, and hidden experience where we have prayed-through to the reality that "God is."*

Hebrews 11:6 *...he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.*

No one else can go there for us: there are no short-cut, quick-fix, cut-rate, bargain anointings. We're not the exception, we'll not become spiritual by accident, we'll not just wake up one day with heavenly authority. If we are to speak for God, instead of about Him, we must pay the price. Think about it, even with tongue and vocal chords, human utterance is impossible apart from the intelligence of the human mind. Likewise, God's open revelation only comes to those who diligently secure His most intimate thoughts.

In closing, allow me to share a humbling experience. In a recent prayer meeting at our church, God spoke to my heart, convicting me of the need for more passionate and believing prayer. I wrote down the words just as they were given to me...

³ E.M. Bounds, *Powerful & Prayerful Pulpits*.

"The 'spirit of prayer' is the single most telling indicator of the quality of spirituality we possess. If we have little heart to pray, if prayer is laborious, if it is difficult to enter in, to stir ourselves to intercede, supplicate, or worship, the ebb of spiritual life is wanting. If, when we should be basking, by faith, in the presence of God, we tend to be restless, unfocused, or, God forbid, bored, then we are in grave danger indeed. We dare not be deluded into believing we are spiritual, or even secure, if our's is the case. Sadly, religious activity is often mistaken or substituted for true spirituality. It is often used in a vain attempt to appease a condemned conscience or soothe a dried and drifting spirit with the counterfeit balm of dead works. The prayerless are sometimes unconsciously driven to bustle about, to stay busy, to keep moving, lest they experience an uncomfortable moment in the presence of an unfamiliar God. If we freely talk to men, but are discomposed before God, let us not be self-deceived, we are in deep trouble. If we are busy, but barren; active, yet aloof, perhaps it's time to step aside, stop, and press back into God's presence. We need to return to our first love, casting ourselves afresh on the Rock of Christ lest the fires of the holy altar be extinguished." -Pastor Britt Williams

May God mercifully draw us, break us, and burden us with a fresh spirit of prayer.

—B.W.