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Sermon preached by Mr. J. Raven at Shaw's Corner
on Sunday evening 27th. November, 1949

Text: "After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art
in heaven, Hallowed be Thy name". Matthew 6.9

The Lord on this occasion was giving some very important, very solemn and heart searching directions with regard to prayer, and He stresses the necessity of secret prayer. The best part, we may say, the all-important part, of true religion is in secret between the soul and God. Too many people have a show of religion which appears perhaps very impressively before men, but there is the lack of the secret part, there is the lack of secret dealings with God at the throne of grace. A prayerless soul is a dead soul: O, if we are utterly prayerless there is the stench of death upon us, but if we are a praying people our prayers will mostly be in secret between our souls and God. I remember my old pastor quoting the saying of some good man to this effect, that backsliding begins at the closet door, and so it does. When the child of God is left to a backsliding course it begins in secret, it begins so to speak, within the closet. If there is death prevailing there, death is stamped upon the whole of our religion, but if we are lively there, there will be life and health manifest in our whole religion. So the Lord said, "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". The Lord here tells us that the Father sees in secret, He sees what is going on in secret, He marks every secret desire, every secret sigh, every secret groan, every unexpressed petition; He marks it, He sees in secret. When Nathaniel was under the fig tree the Lord saw him, knew all about him, knew what he was doing there, what he was thinking about, what his desires were. You remember the Lord said of him, "Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile". Well, the Lord sees in secret, and He can see in secret in respect to His people and their exercises, more than they can see themselves. A poor child of God often is praying when he thinks he is not praying, which is far better than thinking we are praying when we are not praying, and the Lord sees when a poor man is afraid he is not praying, for the Lord sees in that very exercise prayer ascending to His mercy throne. "O that I could pray, O that I could pray!" There is prayer in the very words,

in the very feeling and thought. And so the Father sees in secret and He will give an open reward. God looks upon a good deal of outward show in religion and sees it to be nothing worth. I have thought sometimes of what took place in the days of King Josiah. He was a godly young king and he did his best to bring about reformation in the land, and he did bring about an outward reformation, but he could not change the hearts of the people. So what does the Lord say? The Lord who sees in secret said of the people even in the days of King Josiah, "Judah hath not turned unto me with her whole heart, but feignedly". Ah, He sees in secret, He sees where there is the sincere desire, where there is the heart that feigns towards Him, where there is hypocrisy and formalism, a mere love of show, a desire for the commendation of men, He sees it.

Then He says, "But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking, Be not ye therefore like unto them: for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him." Yes, prayer, and the most orthodox form of prayer, I mean prayer expressed in the most scriptural language, may on people's lips degenerate into mere vain repetitions, and I think this is painfully evident in the present day when multitudes join in what is termed "responses", and it is to be feared that very few of them realise fully what they say or understand the language that is upon their lips. How many people, for instance, use the words "through Jesus Christ our Lord" many times in the course of a Lord's Day. How many understand what it means, how many understand why our good reformers put that so frequently in the liturgy of the Church of England? Very few understand the reason for it, very few at all understand why the words are put where they are, "through Jesus Christ our Lord". Just as many people say "for Jesus' sake" without stopping to think what it means, and although we Strict Baptist do not use a form of prayer in the ordinary sense, yet we may become very formal in our prayers, our prayers may become just a dull, dead, lifeless round. The Lord says, "Use not vain repetitions as the heathen do... be ye not therefore like unto them: for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of before ye ask him", and here He lets fall a very precious truth, "Your Father knoweth what things ye have need of before ye ask Him". Then why pray? Why go before God and ask Him for things if He knows already what we need? Ah, but then, think what a privilege it is to be allowed to go before God in prayer. Think of what a privilege it is to be allowed to hold intercourse with the God of Heaven at the mercy seat. One said, "I prize the privilege of prayer";

it is a high privilege, a privilege that should be highly prized by those who are favoured to enjoy it, a privilege the blessedness of which is beyond all telling, and although the Lord knows what things we have need of, in His great kindness to His people, in His great love to them, He will have them go to His footstool and make known their requests unto Him. He has said He will regard the prayer of the destitute and will not despise their prayer. And the Father Himself has provided a way whereby people may come to Him. The way otherwise was barred, sin has barred it, sin has put great and grievous distance between the sinner and a holy God, but God hath "devised means whereby His banished be not expelled from Him". God hath provided a way whereby poor sinners may approach Him with acceptance, may have liberty in prayer to Him, may have boldness in coming before Him, and may have their mouths opened in petitions at His footstool. Oh, He has given His Holy Spirit, also He has provided a Mediator in the person of His own incarnate Son, who offered Himself without spot to God and who by the shedding of His own precious blood made a way into the Holiest, and that is how by the Spirit poor sinners seek to come before God in the name of Christ, and they plead in their prayers, "through Jesus Christ our Lord". They confess that their only hope is in His blood, His righteousness, His merit and His intercession, and so in their prayers they are compelled to look upon Him, upon what He is and what He has done. "Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which He hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, His flesh". The Father has provided a way then of acceptance for sinners to come before Him, "a new and living way", a way of life. There is no death in that way, no curse meets the sinner in that way, but there is free and blessed access, a certainty of acceptance. And those things that His people have need of, the Spirit of God teaches them to ask. They know not what they need really. They know what they think they want, but they do not know all they need. They only really know what they need by the Spirit's teaching, and the "Spirit helpeth...our infirmities", and "maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God", enabling them to come with all their necessities to the mercy seat.

Well then, the Lord comes and He says, "After this manner therefore pray ye". Mark, He has just been warning His disciples against the use of vain repetitions, and it is a singular fact that the very prayer that on this occasion He taught His disciples, saying,

"after this manner pray ye", should so have been used in vain repetitions. I do not believe for one moment that the Lord intended this prayer to be gabbled over as it is to-day - you can scarcely tell what people are saying - the chief aim seems to be to get over it as quickly as possible, no reverence, no sense of the meaning of the words uttered. "After this manner therefore, pray ye". Well, what does the Lord mean? I believe He means that all real prayer, prayer indited by the Holy Spirit, will be after the pattern of this. We have in this, which is called the "Lord's Prayer", all the essentials of real prayer, and if you draw near to God in spirit and in truth, your approach to Him will be in harmony with the opening sentence of this prayer. "Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name". You may not be able clearly to articulate the "our father", but your prayer as it is indited by the Holy Spirit will be the cry of a child to its father. A little baby will cry, and cry after its parent, before it is able clearly to articulate "father" or "mother", and so it is with the family of God. There is many a one who cries "Abba Father", who cannot distinctly say "Abba Father" - there is the spirit of a child. I think I have before referred to the prodigal son, when in his poverty, he was come to himself, he begins to think in these terms, "there is bread enough and to spare in my father's house". It was "my father's house", although he felt himself unworthy any longer to be called a son and would fain be a mere servant in his father's house, provided he could but be there, but there is the spirit of a son manifested. "I will arise and go to my father", and his father did not disown the relationship, did he? And so it is with poor people who have this cry, the cry of a child, in their hearts, crying after God, the Lord will not disown the relationship.

"Our faith would "Abba Father" cry,
And thou the kindred own".

"Our Father which art in heaven". I have sometimes said it is a sweet thing to be able to say to God, "my Father", but there is an added sweetness in being able to say "our Father" because in this "our Father" there is an embracing of the whole family of God, a recognising the family relationship. Paul speaks like this, "of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named", and in using this expression "our Father" a child of God shows himself to be a member of that great family of blood-bought children, the family in heaven and on earth, "one army of the living God". "Our Father". And then think what a wonderfully blessed thing it is, what a display of divine grace, that we, any of us, should be called the sons of

God. "Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us that we should be called the sons of God". We are sons - sinful men and sinful women, who have spent so large a portion of our days in serving divers lusts and pleasures, "being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world" - to think that such as we should be brought near to God in this wonderfully gracious and sweet relationship of sons and daughters of the Lord God Almighty! Wonderful grace! Amazing love! "Our Father". And see how it is brought about. This relationship with the Father is in Christ Jesus. "When the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons, and because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father". He was made under the law to redeem those that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons, and because ye are sons, because the fact is accomplished, God hath sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father. Oh, when Jesus lived and suffered and died upon the cross, the thing was accomplished. In Him, the crucified Redeemer, His poor people are brought into this relationship with His Father. He said in His message to His disciples, "I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God." "Our Father". Oh, if we are helped to view it in this light, and if we are favoured to see in some measure our own interest in this matter, what a sweetness there will be in these words, "our Father". How we shall wonder at it, that we, that you, that I should be a son or a daughter of the Lord God Almighty! That God should be pleased to make us His sons and daughters in Christ and through Christ, should bless us with the spirit of adoption whereby we cry "Abba Father"; that He should bring us near to Him in this relationship, to speak to Him as a child speaks to its Father, and for us to be under the loving care of Him of whom the Psalmist says, "Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him. For He knoweth our frame: He remembereth that we are dust". "Our Father". Yes, Christ is the Elder Brother, and His people are the young children of His grace. "Our Father which art in heaven". Oh, but He is the God and Father of His people in Christ, He is the God who, with Heaven and earth at His command, yet waits to answer prayer. Myriads of angels do His bidding and they are ministering spirits sent forth to minister to them who shall be the heirs of salvation. Oh what resources God has at His command!

How able He is to do for poor people exceeding abundantly above all they can ask or think! Is anything too hard for the Lord? He encourages and helps His poor people to come to Him with their large requests, with their difficult matters, with things seemingly impossible, He helps them to come to Him and commit their matters into His gracious hands.

"Our Father which art in heaven". It speaks of His majesty, it speaks of His power, it speaks of His throne which is in the heavens, it speaks of His glory, His glory in the creation, the God of glory, and we can never fully utter the true meaning of such terms as these, they are but feeble thoughts at best that we have of the Godhead. "Our Father which art in heaven". Yes, He is above all things, God over all, blessed for evermore, He is God most High - "I will cry unto God most high; unto God that performeth all things for me". "Our God is in the heavens", and He is the living God. Not like the dumb idols of the heathen, He is the living God, He hears prayer, He does things for His people, works deliverances for them, defends them, supplies their needs. It is a wonderful thing to have a God who is doing things for one. It is a wonderful thing to be enabled to testify with the Psalmist of the Lord's goodness. "I was brought low and He helped me". "This poor man cried and the Lord heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles". He is over all, God blessed for evermore. And you remember the Apostle says, "If God be for us, who can be against us?" Oh, if the God of heaven is on our side, if the living God is our God, whom have we to fear? "God is our refuge and strength", said the Psalmist, "a very present help in trouble".

"Our Father which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name". There is another important ingredient, if I may so put it, in real prayer. There will be a real reverence of God, "Hallowed be thy name". He is to be had in reverence of all them which are about Him. He is to be approached unto in a spirit of reverential awe. It is well to have upon the heart an awe of His great majesty. Some people who pretend to be praying, praying unto God, will use a familiarity which is not gracious. There is a gracious familiarity, which is like the familiarity that a child may use to its parent. That is not inconsistent with reverence, but there is such a thing as irreverent approach. "Hallowed be thy name". Well, when we consider that God is holy, that will be sufficient to lay our hearts in a solemn awe before Him. You think of Isaiah the prophet when he saw that vision of the glory of the Lord. He saw the Lord "sitting upon

a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple", and he heard the voice of the seraphims crying, "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts: the whole earth is full of His glory". What was the effect upon the prophet? Why, it was to fill him with solemn awe and a sense of his own sinfulness, "Woe is me! for I am undone: because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips". I have often said there are people who have not a holy God in all their creed. There are numbers of people who think nothing at all of the holiness of God, never reflect upon it, not thinking of the awe which a sense of divine holiness will bring upon a man. "Hallowed be thy name". He is holy. Then He is the God of majesty. What are earthly majesties compared with the majesty of Heaven?

"Ye palaces, sceptres, and crowns,
Your pride with disdain I survey:
Your pomps are but shadows and sounds,
And pass in a moment away."

And one is not necessarily disloyal because he speaks such language as that. It is not disloyalty to weigh against the majesty of Heaven the trifling vanities of earthly majesties. And His majesty is judged to be terrible - terrible majesty. You think of His creation, of His mighty acts as a Creator, how everything speaks of His majesty. Have you ever seen and have felt a solemn sense of His majesty when you have witnessed a terrific thunderstorm? when you have stood upon the sea shore and seen the waves boisterous, great waves dashing up, waves that would make short work of the mightiest steamship. "With God is terrible majesty". You listen to the wind howling, and you see the elements proclaiming the majesty of God. In all these things there is the shining of His majesty - "Hallowed be thy name". How little we are able to speak of such things as these! How very straitened are our deepest conceptions of them!

Well then, there is another thing to be said of God. He is essentially the God of truth, "A God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is He". He is the God of truth, the God of infinite justice, and also He is unchangeable in His Being, unchangeable in all His attributes, and if you consider a little what He is, O how this will be the effect upon you, "Hallowed be thy name". It will fill you with a deep reverence for the God of heaven, and after all, what is a man's religion worth if there is no reverence for God in it. I do not mean merely a pretence of reverence, but I mean a real, deep, heart reverence of God. What is a man's religion worth if

he knows nothing of that? "Hallowed be thy name". If this is really the feeling of our hearts, if it is truly the expression of our heart's desire, shall we not be seeking His glory? Shall we not have an eye to His glory in what we do, in what we say? "Hallowed be thy name". "Whether, therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God", said the Apostle, and as His people are right minded, they would do what they do to His glory. Alas, how short we come! Often I have chided myself for my failure in this. I have asked myself the pointed question, do I ever preach a single sermon with a single eye to the glory of God? Is there not something of pride, something of wishing the people to think well of us and to comment favourably upon the sermon? "Pride comes in at small crevices" one has said, and O how pride and self seeking will sadly mar the ministrations of the best of ministers. We are sinners in all things we do, but O to have by the gracious power of the Holy Spirit, a right desire to do what we do for the glory of God. For His glory to be before us, and for us to be like-minded with the Lord Jesus Christ, who though He knew it meant His own deep humiliation even to the death of the cross, cried, "Father, glorify thy name". Yes, He knew what it meant, and yet He willingly submitted to it. One of the Puritans said it meant "crucify Me". Oh, how willing was Jesus to die, how willing He was to go to the cross, how the glory of His Father's Name, the zeal of His Father's house consumed Him! "Our Father which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name".

Just in conclusion there is this one thing I would say, that God is glorified in doing good to sinners. He is glorified as He manifests His grace to sinners, as He reveals His pardoning love in poor sinners' hearts. "When the Lord shall build up Zion, he shall appear in his glory. He will regard the prayer of the destitute, and not despise their prayer". It is a wonderful thing that a holy God should have bound up with His own glory the good of a multitude of poor, wretched, hell-deserving sinners upon this earth. "Hallowed be thy name". His glory is great in the salvation of His people, they are to be to the praise of the glory of His grace, and the Apostle regarded himself as a conspicuous example. He held himself forth as an example to those who should come after, of the power, the richness, the sovereignty of divine grace. Said, he, "the grace of our Lord was exceeding abundant", and you remember when the people saw the grace of God in Saul of Tarsus, that he now preached the cause that he once despised, he said, "they glorified God in me". What a high privilege for any believer, for God to be glorified in him. Christ was content that God should be glorified by His life or by His death. May the Lord fix our hearts upon this, make this our heart's real petition, "Hallowed be thy name". The Lord add His blessing. Amen.