

A Prayer

by
Thomas Chalmers

Note: the following is a prayer by Dr. Chalmers cited as a preface to one of his sermons; see below for full bibliographic details.

We desire, Lord, to pay Thee the homage of our humility and of our gratitude--of our gratitude, because of the multitude of Thy mercies; and of our humility, because we are unworthy of the least of them. We are the feeble insects of an hour; Thou art the Ancient of days. Thy duration has no end, and Thou art wrapt up in the still more awful mystery of having never had a beginning. The little circle in which we move is but a spot in the immensity of Thy works. Thy presence fills all space and extends through the immeasurable fields of creation. All the powers of our thought and of our attention are taken up with the petty interests of an individual, or with the humble concerns of a family. But Thine all-seeing mind is everywhere. It presides in high authority over all worlds. It takes in at a single glance the endless varieties of life, and motion, and intelligence, nor can the minutest of Thy works escape for a single moment Thy notice and Thy direction.

Blessed be Thy name [that] we are permitted to approach Thee. We are Thy creatures and have the privilege of Thy mercy. Thine all-seeing eye never abandons us. Thou hast given us a part in this wide scene of magnificence and glory. Thou hast taught us to confide in Thy goodness, and given it to feeble, wretched, sinful man to rejoice in the hand that formed, and in the right hand that guides and sustains him.

But how miserable our returns of gratitude and obedience! Alas, we have corrupted our ways. We are children of guilt and disobedience. Look, O Lord, with an eye of pity upon our weakness and upon our errors. Alas, how feeble, how capricious, how ineffectual are our best attempts to love and to serve Thee! We may form a momentary purpose of goodness, but it is speedily lost in the folly and dissipation of the world. In the quietness of solitude our hearts rise to Thee and taste the elevation of piety, [but] in the walks of active life this loftiness of sentiment is forgotten--we mingle in the pursuits of the world and are driven along by the vanity of its perishable interests. In the hour of sickness we shake off the anxieties of time and take a near and an intimate view of the vast eternity which lies before us, [but] in the hour of health the infatuation returns--we place death and eternity at a distance, we get surrounded with the variety of this world's objects, they exert an irresistible dominion over our senses. Time becomes everything, and eternity nothing. The futurity which lies on the other side of time and of the grave is never thought of, or never thought of with improvement. We lose all the impression, all the earnestness of our religious convictions. This world lords it over us. Are we grieved? It is at this world's disappointments. Are we angry? It is at this world's provocations. Are we glad? It is at this world's prosperity. Are we thoughtful? It is about this world's paltry and evanescent interests. The mind loses its elevation, it lets itself down from the grandeur of eternity. It becomes a slave to the delusions of time, and suffers the vanities of an instant to engross all its cares and all its anxiety.

We lament before Thee, O Lord, our hardened indifference in matters of religion--that we

should be so blind to the importance and the magnitude of its interests, that it should occupy so small a portion of our anxiety, that eternity should so seldom be present to our thoughts while this world and the things of this world are suffered to exert an entire dominion over all our desires and all our faculties. Deliver us, O Lord, from an infatuation so ruinous, so unreasonable, so unworthy of beings capable of wisdom and of reflection, and all of whom have a death to endure and an immortality to prepare for. Fill our hearts with serious and permanent and habitual impressions of religion. May it be something more than the momentary impulse of an occasion; something more than that momentary feeling which is excited by the eloquence of a sermon, the enthusiasm of a prayer, or the elevation of a mind which gives an hour to retirement and forms its romantic purposes at a distance from the cares and distractions of the world; something more than that holy rapture which kindles in the bosom when the table of the Lord is spread and the man of God invites us to approach it; something more than those sweet and heavenly emotions which so often fill the heart of the Christian in the solitude of a Sabbath evening, when quietness is on all the hills and everything breathes peace and piety around him. May the preparations of solitude tell upon our conduct in the walks of business and society. May the principles which are formed in retirement have vigour to withstand the difficulties of life and the formidable temptations of the world.

May our religion not be confined to the solemnity of ordinances, [but] may its empire be established in our hearts. May it reign supreme over the thoughts and purposes and affections. May it be with us in solitude as well as in society, in the house of business as well as in the house of prayer and the meetings of the solemn assembly. Let it be the study of our lives to advance the honour of the true religion and to extend its influence in the world. And may we ever remember that the most effectual method of recommending it to the world is to hold out to its view the peaceable fruits of righteousness. May it be the study of our lives to hold out a graceful and an alluring picture of Christianity to the world--to let the world see what the religion of Jesus is capable of effecting, what worth and what embellishment it gives to the character of every true disciple, what graces adorn the walks both of his private and his public history, the honour which reigns over all his transactions, his noble integrity in business, the generous humanity with which he devotes his time and attention to the interests of the species, the pure and unsullied temperance of his life, the virtuous authority with which he discharges the duties of a father, a master, and a husband, the quietness of his happy home where affection reigns in every heart and peace sheds a holy calm over the feelings and tempers of a united family.

Amen.

Preface to Sermon VIII of *Sermons by the Late Thomas Chalmers, D.D. LL.D.*, vol. VI of *Posthumous Works of the Rev. Thomas Chalmers, D.D., LL.D.*, ed. William Hanna (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1849).