

THE SWEETNESS OF MEDITATION

"My meditation of him shall be sweet: I will be glad in the Lord."
(Psalms 104:34).

"Meditation" is a word that seems to have dropped out of our vocabulary. But it has not been left out of God's vocabulary. He considers it one of the essentials for godly living.

What does it mean to meditate? It means to have the thoughts occupied with subjects which present themselves to the mind.

What do you think about when you are alone? You must think about something. It is impossible to keep the mind empty. Whether one is alone or not, the mind will be occupied with the problems of work or business, with memories of the past or hopes for the future. Both agreeable and disagreeable thoughts will come and go like pictures on a screen. What one thinks about will shape his life. It is a man's thoughts about God that explain the quality of his life. He is "like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither." The secret of his fruitfulness is described in the words: "His delight is in the law of the Lord; and in his law doth he meditate day and night."

Meditation in this sense is largely a lost habit. We do not take enough time to be alone and when we are alone we do not occupy our minds with what the Psalmist called the law of the Lord, by which he meant God's will for our lives and His purpose for the world. The result is that our minds are shallow, our purposes puny, our hearts often held captive by worldly anxieties and selfish ambitions. Meditation takes time, time to withdraw from the pressures of the world around us and to be alone with God. What a pity that so many of us neglect this wonderful means of grace! If we are to live as the Lord wants us to live, we must have a means of escape from the things which tie us with ropes and the labors that weigh us down like lead. We must have an escape from the solicitation of things that are seen, from the bitter disappointments and griefs which tend to keep us out of the immediate presence of God.

The human mind is very much like a great library in which are stored books dealing with many of the subjects which have engaged the thoughts of men. You may go into that library and take from one of the shelves a book whose pages will open to your enjoyment another world than the one in which you live. Thus the mind is stored with records. Some of you who have reached middle life, or have passed it, have sometimes been surprised when a record of your earliest years seemed almost involuntarily to tumble from memory's shelf. You have said, "I have not thought of that for years, not since I was a child in fact; I wonder what brought it to my mind?" Even though you have grown older amid varied and every-varying experiences, the memory of that which occurred years ago is stored away, and you are able somehow to recall it -- to bring it back from the subconscious to within the conscious realm. As

you meditate upon it for a while, you are surprised at the capacity of your mind to bring back from the distant past things which then occurred.

The human mind has stored in it records of some things that are good and some that are bad, some of which give inspiration and strength, and others which have the opposite effect. There are three avenues through which knowledge enters the mind -- from that which has been recorded of the lives of others or from our own lives, from observations of that which we have seen and now see going on around us, and from experience. Every mind is more or less stored with material for meditation, as books on the shelves which may be read at will.

Some of you have seen the cattle lying in the pasture fields, and perhaps you have wondered why their jaws were moving. They were not talking, like some people who talk all the time, and never give themselves any rest. They were lazily enjoying themselves by chewing the cud. The cattle go along through the pasture field and crop the grass, and store it away in the rumen. Then, when they have gotten a sufficient supply, they just lie down and regurgitate, just call up that which they have stored away, chew it, masticate it, and enjoy their dinner. That is a figure of meditation. The man said, "I was ruminating." What was he doing? Just calling up from the treasures of the mind the things that had been stored away, and then reasoning and letting his judgment distinguish between the things that differ. So we are to meditate. The Psalmist here speaks of that mental illumination which he calls meditation, calling up something upon which the faculties of the mind may dwell. In substance he says, "For my special subject of meditation, all the energies of my mind shall be directed toward the Lord; I am going to meditate upon Him, and my meditation of Him shall be sweet."

It is possible to meditate on some things and become embittered in spirit. All of us have met disappointed people whose lives had become very bitter because they had treasured in their minds the memory of some disappointing experience with somebody whom they trusted. They nurse those things until by and by nothing sweet remains in their lives. Why allow your mind to dwell on your difficulties until your spirit is sour and embittered? Why let your mind dwell on unpleasant experiences until your very countenance reveals your sourness? It is meditating on the wrong things that brings about that condition.

Why nurse our personal handicaps? Why complain to ourselves of our disappointments? Why meditate upon ourselves? If you think about yourself, you have a miserable subject about which to think. Some people almost worry themselves and others to death because they have nothing to think about except themselves. Meditation upon the Lord will add to the attractiveness of any person.

Regular and frequent meditation upon God should be the practice of every person. Such meditation is difficult for many Christians because it is almost an impossibility for them to think steadily and intently for any length of time. They simply will not control their minds and thoughts. What are some of the things about God on which we should meditate?

1. His greatness.

"And what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power." (Ephesians 1:19).

2. His goodness.

"Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God: on them which fell, severity; but toward thee, goodness, if thou continue in his goodness: otherwise thou also shalt be cut off." (Romans 11:22).

3. His gentleness.

"Thou hast also given me the shield of thy salvation: and thy gentleness hath made me great." (II Samuel 22:36).

4. His guidance.

"I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go: I will guide thee with mine eye" (Psalms 32:8).

5. His grace.

"For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich" (II Corinthians 8:9).

6. His gifts.

"Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variable-ness, neither shadow of turning" (James 1:17).

7. His glory.

"But if the ministration of death, written and engraven in stones, was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not stedfastly behold the face of Moses for the glory of his countenance; which glory was to be done away: How shall not the ministration of the spirit be rather glorious? For if the ministration of condemnation be glory, much more doth the ministration of righteousness exceed in glory. For even that which was made glorious had no glory in this respect, by reason of the glory that excelleth. For if that which is done away was glorious, much more that which remaineth is glorious" (II Corinthians 3:7-11).

After emphasizing the sweetness of meditation on the Lord, the Psalmist said, "I will be glad in the Lord." Gladness is not an external thing, put on like a robe, but it is something that springs from within. Gladness is not in our circumstances, not in other people, but it is in ourselves. Some people have all of their joy wells stopped up; therefore they should open them.