

Up Unto a Mountain

Happy and Blessed Sabbath to all. I hope your week has been filled with opportunities to speak of the Gospel message.

Today's study is called "Up Unto a Mountain." It has seemed to be the case that the most inspired messages I have given over the years, whether by way of encouragement or correction, have been those that are written in response to an immediate need of the Body. Yah reveals His desire for His people, what He wishes to have them do, in various ways, whether through direct contact, through an examination of circumstances, or by the words of our brethren.

Today we are talking about the immediate need for more prayer and meditation amongst our members. The topic, which speaks of mountains, is taken from several verses that say the following: "And when [Yahshua] had sent the multitudes away, He went up into a mountain apart to pray; and when the evening was come, He was there alone." (Mat 14:23)

Many verses speak about Yahshua coming "apart" from the crowds, from other people, and sometimes even apart from His disciples, to go up to a high place to pray. That verse from Matthew speaks of Yahshua being by Himself. Another verse speaks of Him being alone with Peter, James and John. (Luke 9:28) Yet another verse speaks about Him being atop a mountain with His disciples. (Mat 5:1) It seems that there were different reasons why Yahshua would seek a mountaintop. Sometimes it was to teach, and other times it was to pray and be alone with the Father.

The symbolism here should be obvious. Even the pagans would build their sacred places in high spots, and the concept behind the Tower of Babel is spelled out explicitly. There is a mental and spiritual difference that we undergo when we are in a "high place," able to look down on other places, able to feel closer to the Heavens, which the Scriptures always describe as being "upward."

Of course, not all of us have the luxury of being near a mountain... some of us are in cities, others in the desert, but by the faith of Yahshua, we all have access to the same "high place" that He did while He was on earth. Now the question is, how often do we visit this high place?

We are speaking this week about prayer and meditation. We have spoken about prayer in other studies before, so I do not want to spend too much time on the actual act of praying. What I do wish to say, however, is vital, and I pray that you will all take this to heart. Every one of us ought to feel that it is our positive duty to live a life of active prayer. We should be saying, "Of course," but it is one thing to say this, and one thing to believe it of ourselves, and another to follow through on our faith with actions in a perfect way.

There are four things I wish to say tonight about prayer in the CSDA life.

1) Prayer is effective.

We have all heard this. We have likely all said this to others. No doubt we believe that prayer is effective, or we would not be here... but again, how often, practically, do we go up unto Yahshua's mountain to actively pray?

The Scriptures have records of battles being turned, of angels being dispatched on behalf of the saints, and of diseases being cured, as a result of prayer. Even death has been defeated, and the sun stalled or turned back in its arc on two separate occasions, (Josh 10:13, Isa 38:8) at the prayer of Yahweh's saints.

We have examples of this in the Old Testament, the New Testament, and in the history of the Adventist Church. Our pioneers in the faith have recorded healings and other amazing events, manifest at the humble petitions of those who faithfully awaited the Son's return.

Even more recently, the CSDA Church has certainly seen enough incidents to write our own modern "Book of Acts," and those that have borne witness to these mighty works have had their faith strengthened. The Scriptures are not a storybook about times long ago and far away. Our faith is a living, active testimony that connects the earliest recorded works of our Father to this very moment in an unbroken string of miracles.

And yet, we have not seen as many blessings as we ought. We must feel that it is our active, positive duty to seek Yah's face in prayer whenever we are able to do so. This actually leads to the second thing I wish to say:

2) We should feel it is our duty to pray for others, especially when asked.

In this Church, uniquely, we speak of the sin of officiousness; that is, offering advice or assistance when they are neither desired nor requested. Yah will let people do for themselves what they can, because this is how they grow both spiritually and mentally. As we become more like our Father, many of us have begun to see that we have been doing "too much" for others, under certain circumstances.

Now, that sounds very strange, because the Christian ought to be the most kind, courteous and helpful person in the world. And yet, these characteristics do not always manifest in active assistance. We have all no doubt heard of parents who "smother" their children with so much attention that, when they are grown, they are not equipped to live independently. This is excessive affection, but it is not perfect love.

To apply the principle generally, with everyone we meet, we learn to be helpers when it is helpful to be helpful.

But this does not exactly apply to prayer. We ought always to be praying for one another and, if we are asked to pray for a specific thing, we ought to feel that we are commissioned to do so, assuming the prayer is for a proper result. We would not pray, for example, if someone asked us to pray that they would receive something that would not bless them. We might still pray for such a person, but that they receive the spirit of Yah, so that they should know what to ask of Him.

But if we receive emails from Church members, for example, asking for prayer, this is often an instruction from our Father Himself, so that the angels may be charged with the fulfillment of these requests.

3) We should use prayers as an opportunity to witness.

Now, this is something that occurred to me this week with real clarity. My mother went to visit a doctor a few days ago, and she let me know why she was making the trip, saying, "Pray for me that it goes well." I said that I would, and I did... but then it struck me afterwards that I could have used this as an

opportunity to witness, to pray aloud, and in her presence, so that she could hear my relationship with my Father in Heaven.

This may be a new idea for some of you, but I think it is an excellent concept. If someone asks you, “Pray for me,” and you say, “I will,” consider the situation carefully. Perhaps you ought to say, “Let us pray right now, then.”

Let them hear your love for the Creator, and our Savior. Let them hear your respect, and also your familiarity, with the Son of Yah. Let them hear you speak with humility, but also with power, presenting the request of whoever you are praying for before the Everlasting Throne. What power, what a witness, this can be! And when these prayers are answered, imagine the curiosity this may inspire in the one to whom you have witnessed. It is not every day that someone offers to pray for them, and with them. It is not every day that they encounter a messenger of the truth – we ought to feel it is our duty not to waste such precious opportunities when they arise.

Now, that is good so far as praying for others. The fourth and final thing I wish to say about prayer is more about our regular prayers for ourselves, and others in their absence. It is this:

4) Come apart from the world when you pray, as Christ did, when you can.

This study references a mountain, a high and isolated place, as a location for prayer. Yahshua came apart from the world, often apart from everyone else, when He prayed. And He did not have the same level of need for prayer as we do, in a sense. He was born of the Holy Spirit from His appearance in the world, and was sanctified – set apart for righteousness – from everlasting, and yet He felt it was a part of His work to remain in constant contact with the Father. How much more, then, must we feel it is a part of our earthly experience?

When I was in college, I had a group of study partners, about five of us, who regularly met to go over the material from our classes, many of which we had in common. One of them was a devout Muslim. Five times a day, whether he was busy with other things or not, he would excuse himself from our meeting and go off somewhere nearby to pray.

While we have not established such a codified system of daily prayer, the principles that we may draw from such a practice are clear enough. His prayers, which were not the same kind of prayers as our own, served to anchor him, to constantly remind him of his duties, all during the day. Furthermore, the fact that I (and probably others from our study group as well) actually remember it years later demonstrates just how much of a witness such an open religious observance can have.

Now, imagine the impact we could have on others, if they saw us dedicated to our own faith in such a visible way. I do not mean we ought to make an artificial show. There is a real danger in merely obeying a practice because it is a tradition, or someone else’s idea of a duty. There is a real danger in doing things, or even saying words, by “rote,” by memorized repetition. What I mean is, if we make it a point to make prayer a “special” occasion, coming apart from our regular duties in one way or another in order to do so, people will notice. Certainly those of our households (where this applies) will notice.

Those who wrote the Gospels certainly noticed when Yahshua went up to the mountain to pray. People ought to notice our prayer lives as well, and the Spirit can show us just how to do this.

This is what Yah would have His people know about prayer.

Now, what about meditation?

Yahshua was often up on top of that mountain for hours. Given what He had to say about repetitive, rote prayer, it is not likely that He was merely repeating the same words over and over again, or even always speaking aloud. The Scriptures use the word “meditate” fourteen times, and “meditation” another six times.

Simply put, meditation means “to think.” It means to go over events in your mind, and to reflect on those events. New Age practices have their own kind of meditation, which involves trying to empty your mind of thoughts, and various mental exercises. Christian meditation is a very simple matter. It is thinking about a principle or concept of the faith, and considering what it is that our Father wishes to teach us about it.

Meditation is a form of communication with our Father, very similar to prayer. In fact, the line between the two is not perfectly defined, and there is much overlap between the two. Prayer is generally more structured, communicating as speech (or thoughts that could be spoken). Meditation is more passive, allowing Yah to speak to us, awaiting His wisdom, and engaging in a kind of communication that may be described as “communion.”

This word is from the same root where we get the word “common,” or “the same.” If something is “common” to two people, or they have it in common, then it is the same for both. When we commune with Yah, what we are doing is uniting our thoughts with His. It is the very essence of what it means to have the “mind of Christ.” (1Cor 2:16)

What meditation really is, is the believer uniting his thoughts with the Father. Really, Christian meditation is the human being thinking the thoughts of Yah. This is an amazing thought, that although our Father is above us in every way, and specifically states that “my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are my ways your ways,” (Isa 55:8) and although He specifically tells us, “my ways [are] higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts,” (Isa 55:9) there is both a common and a spiritual way of reading even the Scriptures. Those verses are both perfectly true; nevertheless, through Christ, and through Christ alone, we may commune with the Almighty, and share in His thoughts.

This is what we must do. This is what we must learn to do. The only way the 144,000 can follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth is to walk with Him, in step with Him, and in order to do that, we must be agreed. (Amos 3:3) The only way we can agree with Yahweh is to have the Mind of Christ, to think the thoughts of the Almighty, and we do this by following the Everlasting Gospel, the Three Angels’ Message that begins with a calling and ends with a covenant.

Brethren, we must be often in prayer. We must pray effectively, with the expectation of a sure answer. We must pray often, for ourselves and for others. We must pray as a way of witnessing and blessing others, not trying to impress them, but inviting them to share in our faith through our conversations with our Savior. We must consider prayer to be a sacred action, and a sacred time, worthy of being set apart from our daily routine, that we may follow the perfect example of Yahshua.

And finally, we must learn to meditate as the Bible describes – considering the truths of our faith, considering the things we have learned, and thinking Yah’s thoughts about them. In this way, our Father speaks to us, and guides us effectively toward the perfect fulfilling of His will. In this way, our faces will be lit up with the Spirit as we go about, healing the sick, finding the lost, and binding up the wheat for Yah’s barn. Yah invites us to the mountain where Yahshua prayed and thought. Let us accept this invitation as often as we can, and then we will have the power that our Father intends that we have.

Are there any comments or questions about tonight’s study?