

THE PIETY OF DR. MARTYN LLOYD-JONES: SUBMITTING TO THE SPIRIT OF GOD

GEOFFREY THOMAS

Dr. Lloyd-Jones would preach every two years in Aberystwyth, and after one occasion I went to see him for morning coffee. It was a great treat for me to be with him alone. These occasions did not happen often. He always stayed in the home of a local doctor who, when he was a medical student in London, had been converted under Lloyd-Jones' ministry. Henceforth he zealously bought the Doctor's books as they were produced by the Banner of Truth.

When I entered the parlour the Doctor was reading his daily portion from a much worn pocket Bible. He laid it aside and we had an hour together. If we are to consider the piety of Dr Lloyd-Jones let us start with his approach to Bible reading.

READING THE BIBLE

He said to the theological students at Westminster Seminary, Philadelphia in 1969 that:

... [an] essential in the preacher's life is the reading of the Bible. This is obviously something that he does every day regularly. My main advice here is: Read your Bible systematically. The

danger is to read at random, and that means that one tends to be reading only one's favourite passages. In other words one fails to read the whole Bible. I cannot emphasize too strongly the vital importance of reading the whole Bible. I would say that all preachers should read through the whole Bible in its entirety at least once every year. You can devise your own method for doing this, or you can use one of the methods devised by others. I remember how after I had worked out a scheme for myself and the members of my church in my early years in the ministry, I then came across the scheme that Robert Murray McCheyne worked out for the members of his church in Dundee. It is in his biography by Andrew Bonar. By following that scheme of Robert Murray McCheyne you read four chapters of the Bible every day, and by so doing you read the Old Testament once, but the Psalms and the New Testament twice, each year. Unlike many modern schemes he did not just pick out little sections, or a few verses or small paragraphs here and there, and thus take many years to go through the whole Bible, and in some cases omit certain passages altogether. The whole object of his scheme is to get people to go right through the Scriptures every year omitting nothing. That should be the very minimum of the preacher's Bible reading. I have found this to be one of the most important things of all.¹

Then the Doctor underlined that in this way:

Here, I want to say something that I regard as in many ways the most important discovery I have made in my life as a preacher. I had to discover it for myself, and all to whom I have introduced it have always been most grateful for it. When you are reading your Scriptures in this way — it matters not whether you have read little or much — if a verse stands out and hits you and arrests you, do not go on reading. Stop immediately, and listen to it. It is speaking to you, so listen to it and speak to it. Stop reading at once, and work on this statement that has struck you in this way. Go on doing so to the point of making a skeleton of a sermon.

Then there is also this added observation:

For many many years I have never read my Bible without having a scribbling-pad either on my table or in my pocket; and the moment anything strikes me or arrests me I immediately pull out my pad. A preacher has to be like a squirrel and has to learn how to collect and store matter for the future days of winter. So you not only work out your skeleton, you put it down on paper, because otherwise you will not remember it. You think you will, but you will soon discover that it is not so.²

PRAYING

If the essence of piety is personal communion with God then what does Dr. Lloyd-Jones have to say to us on praying? There is one section in *Preaching and Preachers* which is very moving. It is just over two pages in length, and it is the only place in his lectures on preaching that he expands on the theme of prayer. Every sentence is worth reading:

I approach the next matter with great diffidence, much hesitation, and a sense of utter unworthiness. I suppose we all fail at this next point more than anywhere else; that is in the matter of prayer. Prayer is vital to the life of the preacher. Read the biographies, and the autobiographies of the greatest preachers throughout the centuries and you will find that this has always been the great characteristic of their lives. They were always great men of prayer, and they spent considerable time in prayer. I could quote many examples but I must refrain as there are so many, and they are well known. These men found that this was absolutely essential, and that it became increasingly so as they went on.

I have always hesitated to deal with this subject. I have preached on prayer when it has come in a passage through which I have been working; but I have never presumed to produce a book on prayer, or even a booklet. Certain people have done this in a very mechanical manner, taking us through the different aspects, and classifying it all. It all seems so simple. But prayer is not simple. There is an element of discipline in prayer, of course, but it surely cannot be dealt with in that way because of its very nature. All I would say is this — and again I

am speaking here from personal experience — that once more it is very important for one to know one's self in this matter. Whether this is a sign of a lack of deep spirituality or not I do not know — I do not think it is — but I confess that I have found it difficult to start praying in the morning.

I have come to learn certain things about private prayer. You cannot pray to order. You can get on your knees to order. But how to pray? I have found nothing more important than to learn how to get oneself into that frame and condition in which one can pray. You have to learn how to start yourself off, and it is just here that this knowledge of yourself is so important. What I have generally found is that to read something which can be characterized in general as devotional is of great value. By devotional I do not mean something sentimental, I mean something with a true element of worship in it. Notice that I do not say that you should start yourself in prayer by always reading the Scriptures; because you can have precisely the same difficulty there. Start by reading something that will warm your spirit. Get rid of a coldness that may have developed in your spirit. You have to learn how to kindle a flame in your spirit, to warm yourself up, to give yourself a start. It is comparable, if you like, to starting a car when it is cold. You have to learn how to use a spiritual choke. I have found it most rewarding to do that, and not to struggle vainly. When one finds oneself in this condition, and that it is difficult to pray, do not struggle in prayer for the time being, but read something that will warm and stimulate you, and you will find that it will put you into a condition in which you will be able to pray more freely.

But I am not suggesting for a moment — quite the reverse — that your praying should be confined only to the morning when you start your work in your study. Prayer should be going on throughout the day. Prayer need not of necessity be long; it can be brief, just an ejaculation at times is a true prayer. That is, surely, what the Apostle Paul means in his exhortation in I Thessalonians 5:17, "Pray without ceasing." That does not mean that you should be perpetually on your knees, but that you are always in a prayerful condition. As you are walking along a road, or while you are working in

your study, you turn frequently to God in prayer.

Above all — and this I regard as most important of all — always respond to every impulse to pray. The impulse to pray may come when you are reading or when you are battling with a text. I would make an absolute law of this — always obey such an impulse. Where does it come from? It is the work of the Holy Spirit; it is a part of the meaning of, “Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure” (Philippians 2:12-13). This often leads to some of the most remarkable experiences in the life of the minister. So never resist, never postpone it, never push it aside because you are busy. Give yourself to it, yield to it; and you will find not only that you have not been wasting time with respect to the matter with which you are dealing, but that actually it has helped you greatly in that respect. You will experience an ease and a facility in understanding what you were reading, in thinking, in ordering matter for a sermon, in writing, in everything, which is quite astonishing. Such a call to prayer must never be regarded as a distraction; always respond to it immediately, and thank God if it happens to you frequently.

From every standpoint the minister, the preacher, must be a man of prayer. This is constantly emphasized in the Pastoral Epistles and elsewhere, and, as I say, it is confirmed abundantly in the long history of the Church, and especially in the lives of the outstanding preachers. John Wesley used to say that he thought very little of a man who did not pray four hours every day. Nothing stands out so clearly likewise in the lives of people like David Brainerd and Jonathan Edwards, Robert Murray McCheyne and a host of other saints. That is why one is so humbled as one reads the stories of such men.³

So here is a theme that appears to reoccur in Lloyd-Jones’ piety of God’s constant dealings with the Christian, that he is our Father and deals familiarly with his children. Submit to the Spirit of God! Follow God’s promptings in Bible reading and prayer, he is telling us. This is further seen in his counsels about understanding the will of God for your life.

GUIDANCE AND KNOWING THE WILL OF GOD

Dr. Lloyd-Jones acknowledges that this is not as easy as it sounds. He acknowledges,

I was for over two years in a state of uncertainty and indecision before leaving medicine for the pulpit. But in the end it was made absolutely and perfectly clear and mainly by means of things which God did. These are the rules which I would advise you to observe:

1. Never speak to anyone about it. Don't tell people what you are feeling and discuss it and ask for advice. That always leads to still more uncertainty and confusion. Make an absolute rule of this at all costs. Say nothing until you are absolutely certain, because we are all subject to self-suggestion.
2. Do not even think about it and discuss the pros and cons with yourself. Once more this leads to auto-suggestion and confusion. Believing as I do that God does "call" very definitely, and in a distinct and definite doctrine of a call, and that a vocation is distinct from "the need is the call" idea, I believe that God will always make His will and His way plain and clear. With reverence therefore, I say leave it to God entirely as regards purpose, time and all else. All you have to do is to tell God that you are content to do His will whatever it may be and, more, that you will rejoice to do His will.⁴

EXPERIENCES OF THE SPIRIT OF GOD

When he was twenty-six years of age in Easter 1925 he was alone one day in the small study he shared with his brother Vincent in their Regency Street home.

[There] he came to see the love of God expressed in the death of Christ in a way which overwhelmed him. Everything which happened to him in his new spiritual life was occurring because of what had first happened to Christ. It was solely to that death that he owed his new relationship to God. The truth amazed him and in the light of it he could only say with Isaac Watts,

Were the whole realm of nature mine,
 That were a present far too small;
 Love so amazing, so divine,
 Demands my soul, my life, my all.⁵

Iain Murray records that incident and suggests that that was not an isolated occasion. The Doctor himself told me that in his room at Bart's he had some great times, and he has gone on record, "I must say that in that little study at our home in Regency Street, and in my research room at Bart's, I had some remarkable experiences. It was entirely God's doing. I have known what it is to be really filled with a joy unspeakable and full of glory."⁶

It is in the light of this that we must approach his exhortations to know a baptism with the Holy Spirit. That this did not manifest itself in tongue speaking we know because he wrote to an inquirer very plainly, "I have never spoken in tongues either in private or in public."⁷ So the Doctor could not be described as a Pentecostal because their definition of the evidence for the baptism of the Spirit is made in that precise way. What then would be the signs and manifestations of baptism with the Spirit in Lloyd-Jones' judgement? In the book *Joy Unspeakable* he gives six marks:⁸

1. A sense of God's glory and presence⁹
2. An assurance of God's love for us in Christ¹⁰
3. The element of joy and gladness¹¹
4. Love toward God¹²
5. A desire to glorify the Father and the Son¹³
6. Light and understanding of the truth¹⁴

This is what he is referring to when he told me that he had had "good times" in his room at the hospital. He believed they were an experience of baptism with the Holy Spirit. There is, for example, an incident that took place at Christmas 1929; "The memory of that night never faded for those who were present. Mrs Lloyd-Jones recalling it, said: 'As we knelt in prayer I seemed to be full of a warm golden glory, an indescribable joy and a hope that the consciousness we then enjoyed of the presence of God might never pass away.'¹⁵

Such experiences were not the prerogative of the study alone, or with members of one's family but in a church the Spirit of God could

come upon a congregation gathered together praying. He recounts one such meeting, presumably in Aberavon, when a man got up to pray and it became clear that soon “something most extraordinary” was taking place:

...suddenly this man was entirely transformed; his voice deepened, a power came into it, even in his speech, and he prayed in the freest most powerful manner I have ever heard in my life ... the prayer meeting continued without intermission and the freedom that had accompanied this man's prayer was given to all the others ... one felt that one was outside time, that one was in heaven; one was really lifted up to the spiritual realm.¹⁶

One thinks of some of the prayer meetings of ministers gathered at Bala in the annual conference where such experiences might be occasionally known.

It is for preachers to know such immediate experience of this grace that the Doctor is most exercised to have a baptism which enables him to preach powerfully and movingly. He longs that the gospel of Jesus Christ should come propelled to their hearers through Spirit filled men. How do we preachers recognize this when it is happening? He replies,

It gives clarity of thought, clarity of speech, ease of utterance, a great sense of authority and confidence as you are preaching, an awareness of a power not your own thrilling through the whole of your being, and an indescribable sense of joy. You are a man “possessed,” you are taken hold of, and taken up. I like to put it like this — and I know of nothing on earth that is comparable to this feeling — that when this happens you have a feeling that you are not actually doing the preaching, you are looking on. You are looking on at yourself in amazement as this is happening. It is not your effort; you are just the instrument, the channel, the vehicle: and the Spirit is using you, and you are looking on in great enjoyment and astonishment. There is nothing that is in any way comparable to this. That is what the preacher himself is aware of. What about the people? They sense it at once; they can tell the difference

immediately. They are gripped, they become serious, they are convicted, they are moved, they are humbled. Some are convicted of sin, others are lifted up to the heavens, anything may happen to any one of them. They know at once that something quite unusual and exceptional is happening. As a result they begin to delight in the things of God and they want more and more teaching.¹⁷

Such experiences while preaching the Word had been his from the beginning to the end of his ministry. In a letter written when he was twenty-six to his future brother-in-law Ieuan Philips he described speaking in his church in London and records, "It is not for me to say anything about the paper — all I shall say is this. The people who count at Charing Cross all liked it, while I myself was moved to an extent that I have never experienced before."¹⁸

From his gatherings of similar experiences of preachers from the Puritan time until today Lloyd-Jones is firmly in the tradition of experiential Calvinism. He is not a "closet Charismatic." His piety reflects that whole living tradition of intense personal communion with God, power in prayer and in preaching. No "sign gift" was ever insisted upon or even suggested. He was a cessationist; for example for him there was no possibility or need of the gift of apostles being bestowed again upon the church. It was a foundational gift which, when Scripture had been written, ceased to exist. The living Bible was enough: "There is thus no successor to the apostles. By definition, there never can be or has been a successor to the apostles."¹⁹ That is also his conviction for prophets and evangelists. There is thus only the remotest connection between himself and the supporters of the Charismatic Renewal movement, a coincidence of terminology. When we protested to him about his use of the phrase "baptism of the Spirit" because of its takeover by Pentecostals and Charismatics he replied that our fathers had used it in the way he was using it and that though it might have been hijacked by others he was not going to cease using that phrase. There was nothing in his teaching that would have been heretical to preachers from Calvin through to Kuyper. The great theme of his book of sermons on the gifts of the Spirit, *Prove all Things*, is not anti-cessationism but the sovereignty of the Spirit in his operations.

If preachers today went to the Doctor and described to him their experiences of the help of the Spirit of God as they prayed and

preached he would assure them, as he did to virtually all, both the students and older men who went to him in London and described what had happened to them, that they had had a baptism of the Holy Spirit. Then let us pace ourselves for the marathon of a life in the ministry, pastoring wisely men and women with their enormous problems, growing in understanding of the truth, becoming more evangelistically fervent and all the more so as we see the Day approaching.

Unless our experiences of God serve to exalt that God before men we are guilty of a self-indulgent piety. Let me end with my favourite quotation from Lloyd-Jones' book on preaching. I am sure it is often quoted as giving to ministers the great end of their preaching:

There is one thing I have looked for and longed for and desired. I can forgive a man for a bad sermon, I can forgive the preacher almost anything if he gives me a sense of God, if he gives me something for my soul, if he gives me the sense that, though he is inadequate himself, he is handling something which is very great and very glorious, if he gives me some dim glimpse of the majesty and the glory of God, the love of Christ my Saviour, and the magnificence of the Gospel. If he does that I am his debtor, and I am profoundly grateful to him. Preaching is the most amazing, and the most thrilling activity that one can ever be engaged in, because of all that it holds out for all of us in the present, and because of the glorious endless possibilities in an eternal future.²⁰ **E**

GEOFFREY THOMAS is pastor of Alfred Place Baptist Church in Aberystwyth, Wales, UK.

ENDNOTES

1 D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching and Preachers*, (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1971), 171-172.

2 Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching and Preachers*, 173.

3 Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching and Preachers*, 169-171.

4 I am uncertain where this quotation comes from. I quote it from a cutting I made years ago.

5 Iain Murray, *D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones: The First Forty Years 1899-1939* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1982), 85.

6 Murray, *The First Forty Years*, 101.

7 D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Letters 1919-1981* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1994), 205.

- 8 D.M. Lloyd-Jones, *Joy Unspeakable: Power & Renewal in the Holy Spirit* (Wheaton: Harold Shaw Publishers, 1984), 85.
- 9 Lloyd-Jones, *Joy Unspeakable*, 87.
- 10 Lloyd-Jones, *Joy Unspeakable*, 89.
- 11 Lloyd-Jones, *Joy Unspeakable*, 98.
- 12 Lloyd-Jones, *Joy Unspeakable*, 108.
- 13 Lloyd-Jones, *Joy Unspeakable*, 109.
- 14 Lloyd-Jones, *Joy Unspeakable*, 110.
- 15 Murray, *The First Forty Years*, 195, footnote.
- 16 D.M. Lloyd-Jones, *The Christian Soldier: An Exposition of Ephesians 6:10-20* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 348.
- 17 Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching and Preachers*, 324.
- 18 Murray, *The First Forty Years*, 82.
- 19 D.M. Lloyd-Jones, "Apostles, Prophets, Evangelists, Pastors and Teachers" in *Christian Unity: An Exposition of Ephesians 4:1-16* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 186.
- 20 Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching and Preachers*, 98.