

# Sweet Hour of Prayer

By Red Miller

Rev. Thomas Salmon (1800-1854), a Congregational clergyman, served as the pastor of the Congregational Church in Coleshill, Warwickshire, England from 1838 to 1842. Upon his return to New York, he submitted the words to "Sweet Hour of Prayer" to The New York Observer with this note:

"During my residence at Coleshill, Warwickshire, England, I became acquainted with W.W. Walford, the blind preacher, a man of obscure birth and connections and no education, but of strong mind and most retentive memory. In the pulpit he never failed to select a lesson well adapted to his subject, giving chapter and verse with unerring precision, and scarcely ever misplacing a word in his repetition of the Psalms, every part of the New Testament, the prophecies, and some of the histories, so as to have the reputation of knowing the whole Bible by heart."

He asked the Observer to publish these words "if you think them worthy of preservation." The newspaper agreed that the words were worthy, and published them in its September 13, 1845 issue. About fifteen years later, in 1860 or 1861, William Batchelder Bradbury (1816-1868), a composer from New York, wrote the tune that is usually associated with this song. The song's fame grew slowly but surely. It was first published in a Methodist hymnal in 1878.

*But when you pray, go away by yourself, shut the door behind you, and pray to your Father in private. Then your Father, who sees everything, will reward you. Matthew 6:6*

Some people, especially the religious leaders, wanted to be seen as "holy," and public prayer was one way to get attention. Jesus saw through their self-righteous acts, however, and taught that the essence of prayer is not public style but private communication with God. There is a place for public prayer, but to pray only where others will notice you indicates that your real audience is not God. While corporate prayer is also important, because there is power in numbers, but our focus here is on private prayer.

During a conversation about prayer, I once was asked how I could pray for an hour, what could I find to pray about that would take that long? The assumption must have been that praying is simply talking to God, praying for others or about concerns. While those prayers are good and God wants to hear them talking with God is only a part of total prayer. A better word than talking would be communicating with God and communicating is a two way street, it also requires listening. In a personal relationship with someone if one person does all the talking that is a lecture not communication. So one might ask, how do we listen to God?

One way is through scripture, not just simply reading but letting the scripture permeate your mind. Also using a good Bible commentary can help. Another way is through listening and reading proven spiritual leaders. Spending time in a Bible or prayer group sharing with other Christians is a good way to hear from God. One of the great losses of the Christian Church today is the diminished "Prayer Meeting". I also find one of my most special times is in private devotions meditating and listening for God's voice. I've been asked, "How do you know God is speaking to you"? It would be easy to just say I know but more than that my thoughts are such that I know that they don't come from me, and if they are supported by scripture I know they are from God.

"Sweet hour of prayer! Sweet hour of prayer! That calls me from a world of care," An hour spent in private time with God is truly a "Sweet Hour of Prayer."

In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy. Philip. 1:4/