

THE PRAYER LIFE OF JESUS

by Tommy Kelton

INTRODUCTION: WHY STUDY PRAYER?

Prayer is not very important to many of us that are members of the Lord's church. It is not as important as it was to Christ. We spend very little time praying in private; when we do pray, we have a lack of knowledge of how to pray or what to pray for.

In light of this, in the beginning of this study of the prayer life of Jesus, it would be good to think about some reasons why prayer is needful. If we can see the need, we will be willing to pay the price of studying the prayer life of Jesus in detail.

Prayer is important and very needful! When we understand this, we will want to learn all we can about it.

In Ephesians 6:18, Paul tells us to "pray at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints."

This constant, persistent, overcoming prayer is needful because:

1. There is a devil.

"For we are not contending against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against the powers, against the world rulers of this present darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places" (Eph. 6:12). To stand against the devil and his mighty wiles, we must put on the whole armor of God and pray (Eph. 6:13-18).

2. Prayer is God's appointed way for obtaining things, and the great secret of our lack in our life and in our work is neglect of prayer.

"We do not have because we do not ask" (James 4:2). The reason we see so little fruit from our labors is neglect of prayer.

3. Those men whom God set forth as a pattern of what He expected Christians to be — the apostles — regarded prayer as one of the most important businesses of their lives.

"We will devote ourselves to prayer and the ministry of the word" (Acts 6:4). It is also evident from what Paul wrote to the churches and to individuals about praying for them, that much of his time and strength and thought were given to prayer (Rom. 1:9; Eph. 1:15-16; Col. 1:9; I Thess. 3:10; II Tim. 1:3).

4. Prayer occupied a very prominent place and played a very important part in the earthly life of our Lord.

"And in the morning, a great while before day, He

rose and went to a lonely place, and there He prayed" (Mark 1:35). The preceding day had been a very busy one, but Jesus shortened the hours of needed sleep that He might arise early and give Himself to more sorely needed prayer.

"In those days He went out into the hills to pray; and all night He continued in prayer to God" (Luke 6:12). Our Savior found it necessary to pray when he was faced with the important decision of selecting the twelve.

The words "pray" and "prayer" are used at least twenty-five times in connection with our Lord in the brief record of His life found in the four gospels.

Evidently, prayer took much of the strength and time of Jesus.

5. Praying is the most important part of the present ministry of our risen Lord.

"Consequently, He is able for all times to save those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them" (Heb. 7:25). This verse tells us for what purpose He now lives: "to make intercession for us," to pray. Praying is the principal thing He is now doing.

The same thought is found in Romans 8:34: "Who is to condemn? Is it Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised from the dead, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us?"

6. Prayer is the means that God has appointed for our receiving mercy, and obtaining grace to help in time of need.

"Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find help in time of trouble" (Heb. 4:16). These words make it very plain that God hath appointed a way by which we shall seek and obtain mercy and help. That way is prayer.

7. Prayer in the name of Jesus Christ is the way Jesus Christ Himself has appointed for His disciples to obtain fulness of joy.

"Hitherto you have asked nothing in My name; ask and you will receive, that your joy may be full" (John 16:24). Prayer in the name of Christ brings fulness of joy not only because we get what we want; but also because it makes God real. When God is real to us and we are in His presence we have "fulness of joy" (Psa. 16:11).

8. Prayer, in every care and anxiety and need of life, with thanksgiving, is the means that God has ap-

pointed for our obtaining freedom from all anxiety, and the peace of God which passes all understanding.

“Have no anxiety about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 4:6-7). Those persons who know the deep peace of God, the peace that passes all understanding, are men and women of prayer. Time spent in prayer is not wasted, but time invested at big interest.

9. Because of what prayer accomplishes in studying God’s word.

In answer to prayer, my eyes are opened to behold wondrous things out of God’s word (Psa. 119:18). In answer to prayer, I get wisdom (James 1:5).

These needs for prayer show why a comprehensive study of the prayer life of Jesus will be beneficial to all.

The study that follows is intended to focus on what God’s word has to say about the prayer life of Jesus. It is my prayer that He will serve as a guide to our prayer life.

AN OUTLINE OF THE PRAYER LIFE OF JESUS

Christ’s example in prayer is as comprehensive as His teaching about it.

When we remember that some scholars say that around 100 days of Christ’s life are recorded in the gospels the following references to prayer are very significant.

That Jesus taught the necessity of prayer by personal example is a striking feature of the gospels. He Himself prayed when on earth surrounded by our same circumstances and temptations.

Jesus’ life was filled with prayer. *“In the days of His flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to Him who was able to save Him from death, and He was heard for His godly fear”* (Heb. 5:7).

A careful reading of the prayer life of our Lord will convince us of the necessity of praying; we should realize how desperately we need to pray.

The following outline is intended to be an aid to those who want to study Jesus’ prayer life in detail:

I. SOME PRAYERS OF JESUS

- A. Christ began His earthly ministry praying after His baptism (Luke 3:21).
- B. Christ prayed during His early Galilean ministry (Mark 1:35; Luke 5:16).
- C. Christ prayed before He chose the twelve apostles (Luke 6:12-13).
- D. Christ was praying before Peter made the good confession (Luke 9:18-20).
- E. Christ prayed at the transfiguration (Luke 9:28-29).
- F. Christ thanked God that He had revealed His will to babes (Luke 10:21; Matt. 11:25).
- G. Christ was praying when the disciples asked

Him to teach them to pray (Luke 11:1).

H. Christ taught His disciples to pray (Matt. 6:5-15; Luke 11:2-4).

I. Christ prayed after feeding the 5,000 (Matt. 14:23).

J. Christ prayed at feeding the 4,000 (Mark 8:6).

K. Christ prayed when He raised Lazarus from the dead (John 11:41-42).

L. Christ prayed in His hour of trial (John 12:27).

M. Christ prayed for self, disciples and all believers (John 17:1-26).

N. Christ prayed at the last supper (Matt. 26:26-27).

O. Christ prayed for Peter (Luke 22:31-32).

P. Christ prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane (Matt. 26:36-46; Luke 22:39-46; Mark 14:32-42).

Q. Christ prayed at the cross (Matt. 27:46; Luke 23:34,46).

II. OBSERVATIONS ABOUT SOME OF CHRIST’S PRAYERS

A. Christ prayed before great events and crises of His life (Luke 3:21-22; 6:12-13; 9:18-21; Mark 1:35-38).

B. Christ prayed after achievements and important crises (Matt. 14:23; John 6:15).

C. Christ prayed before the great temptations of His life (Matt. 26:36).

D. Christ prayed when life was unusually busy (Luke 5:15-16).

E. Christ prayed in time of deep joy (Luke 10:21-22).

F. Christ prayed in time of deep anguish (Mark 14:33-42).

G. Christ gave thanks when food was served (Matt. 14:19; 26:26; Mark 8:6; John 6:11).

H. Christ prayed early in the morning and late at night (Mark 1:35; Luke 6:12).

I. Sometimes Christ prayed with His disciples, but mostly alone (Luke 9:29; Mark 6:46; Luke 9:18; Matt. 14:23).

III. SOME PERSONS AND THINGS JESUS PRAYED FOR

A. Jesus taught prayer was necessary on the part of the disciples for them to cast out evil spirits (Mark 9:29).

B. Jesus taught disciples they ought to pray always and not lose heart (Luke 18:1).

C. Jesus prayed for the comforter to come (John 14:16).

D. Jesus prayed for Peter (Luke 22:31-32).

E. Jesus prayed for Himself, His disciples and those of us who believe through their word (John 17:1-26).

F. Jesus tells us to pray the Lord of harvest to send forth reapers (Luke 10:2).

Jesus continually prayed and He knew that the Father heard Him when He prayed (John 11:41-42). He and the Father were in constant communication. He truly prayed always and never lost heart (Luke 18:1).

We Christians should have as our primary purpose in

life to be like Christ. He has left us an example that we should follow in His steps (I Pet. 2:21). We should do as He has done (John 13:15) and walk in the same way in which He walked (I John 2:6).

We are not like Christ unless we pray the way He did! I hope you will carefully study these scriptures on the prayer life of Jesus and propose to make prayer more a part of your life.

WHEN JESUS PRAYED

PRAYER AT THE BAPTISM OF CHRIST

Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized, and was praying, the heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended upon Him in bodily form, as a dove, and a voice came from heaven, which said, "Thou art My beloved Son; with Thee I am well pleased" (Luke 3:21-22).

The public ministry of Jesus began with His baptism "to fulfill all righteousness" (Matt. 3:15). It was not merely by chance that on such an occasion Jesus should pray. His baptism signified the act of supreme self-consecration, of submission to the Father's will. To successfully complete His mission, He had to depend on the power of God, so He prayed. His prayer was as significant as His baptism.

God was pleased with Christ praying as well as Him being baptized.

PRAYER DURING EARLY GALILEAN MINISTRY

And in the morning, a great while before day, He arose and went out to a lonely place, and there He prayed (Mark 1:35).

But He withdrew to the wilderness and prayed (Luke 5:16).

Jesus knew supremely well the value of private prayer. Christ died in solitude. He separated Himself from His exhausting, busy ministry and found help from His Father.

When it came time to commune with His Father, everybody and everything else could wait.

PRAYER BEFORE HE CHOSE THE TWELVE

In these days He went out into the hills to pray; and all night He continued in prayer to God and when it was day, He called His disciples, and chose from them twelve (Luke 6:12-13).

Jesus had to make one of the most important decisions of His ministry — the choosing of that close inner circle of men He would call apostles. Perhaps no choice between the Jordan River and the garden of Gethsemane was more significant than this one.

So He prayed. This time he did not merely get up early. This time He did not go to sleep at all. He spent the whole night praying.

PRAYER BEFORE PETER MADE THE GOOD CONFESSION

Now it happened that as He asked them, "Whom do

people say that I am?" And they answered, "John the Baptist; but others say Elijah; and others, that one of the prophets has arisen." And He said to them, "But whom do you say I am?" And Peter answered, "The Christ of God" (Luke 9:18-20).

This is one of the most crucial moments in the life of Jesus. He asked this question when He was already turning His face to go to Jerusalem (Luke 9:51). He well knew what awaited Him there, and the answer was of supreme importance. So He prayed before He asked this question of the apostles.

PRAYER AT THE TRANSFIGURATION

Now about eight days after these sayings He took with Him Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain to pray. And as He was praying, the appearance of His countenance was altered, and His raiment became dazzling white (Luke 9:28-29).

The praying of Jesus is the key to understanding His transfiguration. It was while Christ was praying that the great change took place which caused His face and garments to shine with splendor.

Christ received the approval of God as a result of His prayer and life (Luke 9:35).

PRAYER THAT GOD'S WILL HAD BEEN REVEALED TO BABES

In that same hour He rejoiced in the Holy Spirit and said, "I thank Thee, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that Thou hast hidden these things from the wise and understanding, and revealed them to babes, yea, Father, for such was Thy gracious will" (Luke 10:21).

Christ realized that His Father was the source of all blessings and therefore gave thanks and praise to Him (Mark 8:6; Matt. 26:27).

In the particular passage quoted here, He praised His Father as the Lord of creation, and He expressed His gratitude for His goodness and power which made possible the revelation of divine truth.

PRAYER WHEN THE DISCIPLES ASK JESUS TO TEACH THEM TO PRAY

He was praying in a certain place, and when He ceased, one of His disciples said to Him, "Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples" (Luke 11:1).

The disciples had observed something astonishing about the way Jesus prayed and wished to be able to pray as He prayed. His praying was different from their traditions, different from the way they prayed. They wanted to learn to pray as Jesus prayed.

CHRIST TAUGHT HIS DISCIPLES TO PRAY

Father, hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread; and forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone who is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation (Luke 11:2-4; Matt. 6:9-15).

(This model prayer will be discussed in detail in another section.)

PRAYER AFTER FEEDING THE 5,000

And after He had dismissed the crowds, He went up into the hills by Himself to pray. When evening came, He was there alone (Matt. 14:23).

After the important event of feeding the five thousand and the multitudes wanting to make Him king, Christ withdraws to Himself so He can commune with His Father. Our Savior needed time to be alone and pray.

PRAYER AT THE FEEDING OF THE 4,000

And He commanded the crowd to sit down on the ground; and He took the seven loaves, and having given thanks He broke them and gave them to His disciples to set before the people; and they set them before the crowd (Mark 8:6).

This is another example of Jesus giving thanks to His Father. This time it is given for the food, as in Matthew 26:27.

PRAYER WHEN JESUS RAISED LAZARUS FROM THE DEAD

So they took away the stone. And Jesus lifted up His eyes and said, "Father, I thank Thee that Thou hast heard Me. I know that Thou hearest Me always, but I have said this on account of the people standing by, that they may believe that Thou didst send Me (John 11:41-42).

Jesus knew that God always heard Him when He prayed and was thankful for this. Here He calls upon God to raise Lazarus that the people might believe that His Father sent Him. This answer to Jesus' prayer was one of the greatest miracles He ever performed, and its results were among the most spectacular. Christ prayed and Lazarus was raised.

PRAYER IN CHRIST'S HOUR OF TRIAL

Now is My soul troubled and what shall I say? "Father, save me from this hour?" No, for this purpose I have come to this hour. Father, glorify Thy name (John 12:27).

Christ was almost under the shadow of the cross; the sins of mankind were about to be laid on Him; one of His twelve disciples was going to deny Him and swear he never knew Him; another was to sell Him for thirty pieces of silver; all were to forsake Him and flee.

In all of this, Jesus was troubled. Therefore, He prayed. Instead of praying for deliverance from this burden, He prayed that God would do that which would promote His glory regardless of the suffering of Himself.

This was equivalent to the prayer: "Not My will, but Thine be done" (Luke 22:42).

PRAYER FOR HIMSELF, THE APOSTLES AND ALL BELIEVERS

John 17 is the longest and most complete prayer of Jesus recorded in the New Testament.

The prayer breaks down into three sections: (1) Jesus' prayer for Himself (vs. 1-5); (2) Jesus' prayer for the apostles (vs. 6-19); and (3) Jesus' prayer for all

believers (vs. 20-26).

The section where Jesus prays for Himself (vs. 1-5) is highlighted by the word *glorify*. Jesus prayed for the Father to "*glorify Thy Son*" (v. 1) and for the Father to "*glorify Thou Me together with Thyself*" (v. 5).

In the section where Jesus prays for the apostles (vs. 6-19) He prayed for their oneness or unity (v. 11); their protection from evil (v. 15); and their sanctification (v. 17).

In the third section, Jesus prays for all who believe on Him through the word of the apostles (v. 20). He prayed that we all might be one as He and the Father are one (v. 20-23). He further prayed that we might behold His glory (v. 24).

This prayer is addressed to His Father. Six times He prays to God as His Father, twice He refers to Himself as the Son. However, His prayer goes far beyond this in being an intimate dialogue between the Son and the Father. In the twenty-six verses that make up this chapter of John's gospel, Jesus uses a personal pronoun (I, me, my) to refer to Himself over fifty times, and a personal pronoun (you, your) addresses His Father fifty times. Every verse averages almost five references by Jesus to Himself or His Father.

This prayer of Jesus is a personal prayer addressed to His Father in personal terms. It is a prayer built around the words "I" and "You." It is not a speech about God; it is a conversation with God. It is one person talking to another person, as an expression of their intimate relationship.

In this prayer, Christ made seven requests: one for Himself, four for His apostles and two for the disciples that would believe on their words. Six times in this prayer, He repeats that God had sent Him. He speaks of the world nine times, and makes mention of His apostles and those who believe on Him fifty times.

From this, it is apparent that His main concern was for His apostles and those that would believe on Him through their word.

This prayer in John 17 is a prayer that sums up His entire life of prayer. In it, we can feel the very heartbeat of the Master as He prays to His Father. It can serve as a model for us, as we pray in imitation of Christ.

PRAYER AT THE LAST SUPPER

Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed, and broke it, and gave it to the disciples and said, "Take, eat; this is My body." And he took a cup, and when He had given thanks He gave it to them, saying, "Drink of it, all of you" (Matt. 26:26-27).

In instituting the Lord's Supper, Christ prayed for the bread and the fruit of the vine. He set the example of giving thanks when the bread and the cup are partaken.

PRAYER FOR PETER

"Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have

you, that he might sift you like wheat, but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail; and when you have turned again, strengthen your brethren" Luke 22:31-32).

Jesus did not pray that Peter be spared from the sifting. He did not pray that the trial would be brief. Instead, He prayed that Peter's faith not fail. He prayed that Peter's faith would come out whole on the other side to be used to fit his life back together.

PRAYER IN THE GARDEN OF GETHSEMANE

And He came out, and went, as was His custom, to the Mount of Olives; and the disciples followed Him. And when He came to the place He said to them, "Pray that you may not enter into temptation." And He withdrew from them about a stone's throw, and knelt down and prayed, "Father if Thou art willing, remove this cup from Me; nevertheless not My will, but Thine, be done." And there appeared to Him an angel from heaven, strengthening Him. And being in agony He prayed more earnestly; and His sweat became like great drops of blood falling down upon the ground. And when He arose from prayer, He came to the disciples and found them sleeping for sorrow, and He said to them, "Why do you sleep? Rise and pray that you may not enter into temptation" (Luke 22:39-46).

Matthew quotes Jesus as saying, "My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even unto death" (Matthew 26:38).

Mark says Jesus was "sore amazed" and "very heavy" (Mark 14:33). Luke in this reading says, "Being in agony . . . His sweat became like great drops of blood falling down upon the ground" (Luke 22:44).

In this deep agony, Jesus prayed three times for the cup to pass from His lips; but each time He added a qualification to His prayer: "Not my will, but Thine, be done." Above all else, His desire was to submit Himself completely and fully to the Father's will.

The book of Hebrews, referring to this experience in Christ's life, speaks of Him: "In the days of His flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to Him who was able to save Him from death, and He was heard for His godly fear. Although He was a Son, He learned obedience through what He suffered; and being made perfect He became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey Him" (Heb. 5:7-9).

Jesus' prayer in the Garden was a petition for strength to fulfill the purpose of His life. That prayer was heard and therefore He is the source of our salvation.

PRAYER FROM THE CROSS TO FORGIVE

And Jesus said, "Father forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34).

Christ spoke from the cross seven times. Three of these utterances were prayers.

Jesus' first words from the cross were a prayer of forgiveness. This is one of the greatest prayers of the Bible. It shows the unlimited love that Christ has for all men, both friend and foe.

The people He prayed for were all gathered around watching the show. There were the religious leaders who had organized the crucifixion. There were the Roman soldiers who saw this as just one more execution, gambling over His clothing. There was the crowd that was standing by watching, doing nothing.

Jesus prayed for them all, for the soldiers, the religious leaders, and for the silent majority. He prayed for all those who were hurting Him. He asked God to forgive them.

PRAYER FROM THE CROSS ASKING WHY HE WAS FORSAKEN

And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?" that is to say, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" (Matt. 27:46).

Jesus did not ask, "Have you forsaken me?" His plea was, "Why have you forsaken me?" God has turned away from Him. The One who knew no sin had been made sin (II Cor. 5:21) for all of us.

The forsaking of Christ by God because of our sins shows the great price that our Lord paid that we might be saved.

There is no deeper cry of despair than the question "Why?" shouted from one who already knows the answer. "Why . . . ? Why . . . ? Why have you forsaken me?"

The depth of meaning in this cry of deep anguish can never be fully understood by us mortals.

PRAYER FROM THE CROSS COMMITTING HIS SPIRIT TO GOD

Then Jesus, crying with a loud voice, said, "Father, into Thy hands I commit My spirit" (Luke 23:46).

Jesus began His earthly ministry in prayer, and now in prayer He ends it. He used His last breath to say a prayer of faith and commitment to His Father.

From the beginning to the end, the earthly life of Jesus was lived in a spirit of sincere, fervent, persistent, humble, trusting prayer. There is no doubt about it — our Lord was a man of prayer.

In every respect, with but one exception, Jesus is our example in prayer; He never petitioned God for the forgiveness of sins because He had no sin (I Pet. 2:22-23; II Cor. 5:21; Heb. 4:15).

The information we have given in this material concerning the prayer life of Jesus shows the significance of prayer to all Christians. May God help us to pray as He prayed.

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About the author:

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Brother Kelton says anyone can use this material freely.