

## Jesus, Man of Prayer

### Luke Series #16

David Sunday

April 21, 2013

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Lord, we thank You that our Savior, Christ, suffered in the flesh so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. God, we pray that You would take all our hunger for vain recognition and desire for the forbidden and crucify them. Cause us to see the new life that is ours in Christ and to embrace Him—the risen Savior—in all His fullness. Lord, as we pray we ask You to teach us to pray. Lord, increase the temperature of our prayer lives. Increase the attitude and intensity of corporate prayer in the life of our church, not so we can boast or think well of ourselves but because we are desperately dependent on You. We long for You to be made known in our midst and to the community in which we live. So help us, Lord. As we look into Your Word, may Your Spirit empower the preaching and hearing of Your Word. Open our eyes that we may see wonderful things. In Jesus name we pray. Amen.

If you are a Christian, you long to go be with Christ. You understand the Apostle Paul's dilemma when he said he was hard pressed between choosing to stay here and labor fruitfully for Jesus and choosing to go be with the Lord. He didn't know which he should choose (Philippians 1:22-23). If you were given the opportunity today to depart and be with Christ, there would probably be some hesitation. There would be things you would be reluctant to leave.

I think of my marriage and how much I delight in it. I have a desire to grow old together with my wife. I think of our children and how much joy I have raising three teenagers with Kate. I think of how exciting it is and how we long to see them grow up to serve the Lord. You want to see those things. I see our church and think, "If it would be a blessing to you and bring glory to God, I would desire to serve here for a long time and see God work through that ministry."

But above all those things, there is one thing that I really long for God to do more in my life before He takes me home. I would like God to make me more a man of prayer. When I get to heaven, I don't want to meet a Savior I've only known from a distance. I don't want to meet a God I've only spoken to occasionally, formally addressed, briefly communicated with or with Whom I've sporadically kept up a relationship. I want to meet the One I've been walking with in prayer throughout my journey into His presence. I want it to be the continuation of a life-long conversation.

It would be wonderful to go like Enoch, who walked with God and then was no more. Day by day he walked in fellowship with God. One day, when Enoch turned to go back to his home, God said, “Enoch, you’re not going back there today. You’re coming up into My presence.” It was the continuation of a lifelong relationship—a cultivation of communication with God.

If I landed in the emergency room—consciously hanging between life and death—I do believe I would have some regrets. I believe one of the things I would wish I had done more of is to pray—to spend time in the presence of God. In fact, a few years ago I started to pray specifically, “Lord, whatever it takes. Whatever You need to do in my life to make me more of a man of prayer, please do it.” God has been answering that request, but I long for it more.

Have you ever thought of the Lord Jesus Christ as a Man of prayer? Do you ever feel surprised when you read in the Gospels of how often Jesus prayed? After all, Jesus did not need to pray about many of the things for which we need to pray. Jesus never needed to confess sin or ask God to make Him more holy, loving, patient or kind. He never had to end His day saying:

*Search me, O God, and know my heart!  
Try me and know my thoughts!  
And see if there be any grievous way in me.*

(Psalm 139:23-24)

Jesus didn’t need to pray like that. We do, but He didn’t. Does it ever surprise you that the One Whom winds and waves obeyed, Who raised the dead, Who made the lame man walk, Who gave the blind their sight and Who had all that power and authority was also the One Who—more than any other man—lived a continuous life of prayer? We use titles to praise and thank our Lord Jesus for Who He is and should add this one to our vocabulary: Jesus, Man of Prayer. Give Him thanks and praise for being so faithful in His prayer life.

As we glance at Jesus’ prayer life, we see it woven like a subtle thread throughout the gospel accounts. If we rush, we may not even notice it’s there. But on closer examination, we discover this is the thread that holds together the whole fabric of our Savior’s life and ministry. He continued earnestly in prayer. The gospel writers treat the prayer life of Jesus with a sacred reserve—almost a holy hush—as if to refrain from peering too closely into the intimacies of communion between the Father and Son. Yet whenever they speak of Jesus’ prayer life, my attention is riveted. It is like seeing a fountain leaping high into the air and knowing there is a hidden spring underneath—feeding the fountain. When I see these ‘eruptions’ of prayer in the life of Jesus that come throughout the gospels, I realize this is what was fueling His life and ministry. This was the secret of His power.

In fact, Jesus' prayer life is the constant theme of His life. Someone has said, "His life was a ceaseless concert of prayer interrupted by healings, accented by preaching and crescendoing in the great giving of His life on the cross." It was His life of prayer that fueled all this. Someone else rightly said, "He did not say prayers some of the time. Jesus was prayer all the time." His life was a life of prayer.

He showed us how to live as a human being dependent on our God. Jesus wasn't partly man and partly God. He was fully one with us in our humanity and fully one with God in His deity. As a man, He explicitly depended on prayer. E. M. Bounds said, "Prayer was the secret of His power, the law of His life, the inspiration of His toil and the source of His wealth, His joy, His communion and His strength."

The main question I want to press upon us as we look in the Gospel of Luke at Jesus' prayer life is this: Knowing Who Jesus is and His constant need for prayer, how much do we—knowing who we are—need to follow His example in this regard? If Jesus needed to pray, how much more do we? If Jesus drew His strength from prayer, how much more must we?

Prayer is the Christian's vital breath,  
the Christian's native air...

(From Prayer is the Soul's Sincere Desire by James Montgomery, 1818)

Let's walk through Luke's Gospel and examine this thread. As we do, let's pray, "Lord, teach us to pray. Do whatever it takes to make us men and women of prayer. Make us a church that prays."

In Luke 3:21-22, the Apostle Luke recounts Jesus' baptism and is intent on reminding us that Jesus was praying. He is the only Gospel writer who records this about the baptism.

*Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heavens were opened, and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form, like a dove; and a voice came from heaven, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased."*

Did you know Jesus depended on the Holy Spirit throughout His earthly ministry? He did not operate in His Own strength but depended on the empowering of the Spirit to heal the sick, preach the gospel and lay down His life in suffering on the cross. It was through this Spirit that He did all these things.

So we find Him praying after He was baptized. The Bible doesn't tell us specifically what He was praying for but it does tell us what happened when he was praying. The heavens were opened and the Holy Spirit descended upon Him in bodily form like a dove. It was this Holy Spirit Who accompanied Jesus and empowered Him throughout His ministry, without Whom Jesus would do nothing. Jesus tells us in Luke 11:13: "*If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!*" So we must be in a prayerful attitude

of dependence and ask for the empowering ministry of the Holy Spirit in our own lives and ministries. If we are to walk as Jesus walked and continue to do the works that He did, we must consciously, actively, continuously depend on the Holy Spirit's influence and empowering. If Jesus needed to pray for the empowerment of the Holy Spirit in His ministry, how much more do we?

In Luke 4:1-2 we read:

*And Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness for forty days, being tempted by the devil. And he ate nothing during those days. And when they were ended, he was hungry.*

As He was fasting for 40 days, His fasting would surely have been accompanied by prayer. He didn't fast for ascetic, disciplinary purposes. He fasted in order to concentrate His attention on communion with the Father. Through this fasting and prayer, He was fortified to stand firm when the fierce assault of Satan came upon Him. Jesus was the representative of humanity—the new, second Adam from above. As the devil threw his assault of temptation upon Him, Jesus was standing firm with the full armor of God in place. It was through His prayer that He was enabled to resist the enemy.

If we do not by prayer secure the full armor of God continuously, we make ourselves vulnerable to surprise attacks. Jesus says, *"Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation"* (Matthew 26:41) and fall under the tempter's power. So if Jesus needed to pray to stand firm against the assaults of the enemy, how much more do we? Do you pray as if you are in a war, with vigilance? Do you pray as if your spiritual life depended on it, as if at any moment a fierce tempter would overtake and seek to devour you? Do you pray realizing you must be strengthened by power in the inner man in order to resist the devil and have him flee from you? Jesus prayed, and it was a strength against the tempter.

In Luke 4:38, we discover Jesus has had a very busy Sabbath day. He has been teaching and preaching with authority and casting out demons (verse 41). Then He heals Peter's mother in law and presumably has a quick meal in her house. Luke 4:40 says,

*Now when the sun was setting, [His ministry was continuing; this was a long day for Jesus] all those who had any who were sick with various diseases brought them to him, and he laid his hands on every one of them and healed them. And demons also came out of many, crying, "You are the Son of God!" But he rebuked them and would not allow them to speak, because they knew that he was the Christ.*

All this was going on and it seems it continued through the night (verse 42)! There was constant activity of spiritual warfare and proclamation and healing. Then we read, *"And when it was day, [the sun is already coming up] he departed and went into a desolate place"* (verse 42). Mark tells us He went there to pray (Mark 1:35). *"And the people sought him and came to him, and would have kept him from leaving*

*them*” (Luke 4:42). We get this picture of our Savior that He was constantly under pressure, there were always crowds around and He rarely had any privacy. He hardly had time to eat but He always made time to pray. In the midst of His business and demands on His ministry—when He had great successes in His ministry—He followed up with seasons of prayer.

Sometimes after we’ve poured ourselves out in ministry, we feel depleted. We can start to get discouraged and depressed. But Jesus went to His Father after He had poured Himself out and was strengthened. Sometimes after we have success in ministry, we can feel elated and prideful. Jesus shows us the antidote to pride by going to the desolate place and getting into the presence of His Father, remembering and deriving that it is in the Father that His strength is found.

When Jesus was very busy, He prayed. Look at Luke 5 where He cleanses a leper. After He did this great miracle, *“But now even more the report about him went abroad, and great crowds gathered to hear him and to be healed of their infirmities. [So they are pressing in constantly. “Jesus, we need you! Heal us, do this for us.”] But he would withdraw to desolate places and pray”* (Luke 5:15-16). This was the habit of His life. He wasn’t afraid to pull away from all the needs and demands. He knew He needed to be strengthened by the Father. When we are busy, often we make it an excuse for not praying. “I’m too busy. I don’t have time.” When He was busy, Jesus made it a mandate to pray.

Martin Luther said, “I have so much to do today that I’m going to need to spend three hours in prayer to get it all done.” That almost sounds mythical but you get the idea. The more I need to do, the more I need God to do something in me so I can do what I need to do. What should be our model? “I’m too busy to pray,” or “I’m too busy not to pray”? If I’m in a hurry—frantic and frenzied—I won’t be of much use to anyone. I need my inner man calmed and my spirit composed in order to serve and minister to others. Where does that composure take place? In the secret place of the Most High, resting under the shadow of the Almighty. That’s where we are strengthened for the demands upon our lives.

James Stalker, in his book on the example of Jesus Christ, says, “When the dust of busyness so fills your room that it threatens to choke you, sprinkle it with the water of prayer, and then you can cleanse it out with comfort and expedition.” I like that picture. Busyness is crowding in on my life. What do I need to do? Sprinkle it with prayer. Then I will be able to cleanse the frantic, worried spirit with comfort and do my work expeditiously.

There is a test for us here. When we’re really busy, is it because we’re developing a ‘Messiah complex’? Is it because we think of ourselves as indispensable? Do we need to be needed, fear man and desire to make a good impression on others? Our ministry can be done out of selfish, wrong motivations. We resist these sinful tendencies by continually returning to prayer. There is only one Messiah—One Who is really needed—and that is God. We show our belief and trust in that by continually going to pray

in the midst of the pressures and demands of our lives. If Jesus did that, how much more do we need to do that?

In Luke 6:12, a momentous decision is pressing upon Jesus. He needs to choose His apostles who will partner with Him and carry forth His ministry when He ascends to the right hand of the Father. The future of Christianity is at stake in this choice. So what does Jesus do? *“In these days [that is plural, indicating this was customary for Jesus—the habitual rhythm of His life] he went out to the mountain to pray, and all night he continued in prayer to God.”* When He arrived at a city, Jesus wasn’t thinking about finding the best hotel or finest restaurants or nice shops. He was looking for the path to the mountain so that when His work was done He could seclude Himself in the presence of the Father. He loved to go into nature—to go high above the hustle and bustle of the crowds. He loved to be in the presence of God and God’s creation and unburden His soul to God.

Maybe you have a place like this where you love to go. Whenever you go there, it has the effect of calming and quieting your soul and reminding you of God’s presence. We need to find places of solitude in order to pray, where there is no email or phone ringing every five minutes, no tweets coming through. With all these distractions, we need to silence our phones for a while and say, “If it’s important, they will call me back.” We need to find those places of solitude so we can be alone with God as Jesus was. *“...he went out to the mountain to pray, and all night he continued in prayer to God.”* Solitude is not just found in a place, but in times. There have to be times that we discipline ourselves to set aside and know we will not be interrupted—times when we can concentrate on prayer. In this case, Jesus engaged in prolonged prayer all night in the presence of God.

One of the Puritans said, “Unless a man takes himself out of the world by retirement and self-reflection, he will be in danger of losing himself in the world” (Dr. Benjamin Whichcote, 17th Century). Jesus did this all night. While others were sleeping, He was being renewed in His inner man by seeking wisdom and counsel from His Father and He continued this way in prayer all night. Then God gave Him the wisdom He would need for the day when He would call His disciples and choose them.

What if we faced our challenges the same way Jesus did? Wouldn’t it simplify things if our first impulse was to pray? I can remember being in an elder meeting several months ago. I don’t remember what we were discussing, but it was something with which we were wrestling and trying to figure out the best thing to do. Justin Taylor was in the room with me and sent me a text: “We should pray about this.” When that came through, I wondered, “Why didn’t I think of that sooner?” It simplifies things so much.

We don’t want to be a church that simply learns how to run the machinery of ministry without being fueled by the Holy Spirit’s warmth, light, love and power. God deliver us from turning the church into a well-oiled machine of man’s doing. Anyone who has followed what God has done in our congregation knows that all glory goes to Him. This has been His work—calling us together—and there

are much greater things He still intends to do through us. But it is vital that we continuously and consciously—sometimes with prolonged attention—devote ourselves to prayer. It is here that we remember this is not us. This is God’s work and how we need Him!

This is something we’ve felt convicted by as elders and we’ve been making earnest efforts in all our meetings to devote time to prayer for the congregation and the opportunities that lie ahead of us. As a church, we have a prayer meeting on the first Wednesday of each month—. We don’t stay all night. But wouldn’t it be neat if God moved on us with such power and strength that we felt we had to stay longer? If Jesus needed to get away to spend a night in prayer, how much more do we need to gather on a regular basis to say, “Lord, apart from You we can do nothing. Recalibrate our minds and hearts to Your priorities. Get ahold of us, Lord, where we rely on the flesh and empower us where we are weak.” If Jesus needed to pray at momentous points of decision, how much more do we as a church?

Luke 9:18-20 gives us a sketch and reminds us there is an undercurrent fueling our Lord Jesus. Here is another ‘eruption’ from the fountain of Jesus’ prayer life. God is saying to us, “Remember this thread is part of the fabric that held our Savior’s ministry together.”

*Now it happened that as he was praying alone, the disciples were with him. And he asked them, “Who do the crowds say that I am?” And they answered, “John the Baptist. But others say, Elijah, and others, that one of the prophets of old has risen.” Then he said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” And Peter answered, “The Christ of God.”*

I don’t want to read more into the text than I should, but I do find it instructive that before Jesus asked Peter and His other disciples, “*Who do you say that I am?*” He was praying. I think before we introduce others to Jesus, we should be praying that God will reveal Who Christ is to them. Before we speak to men about God, we should be speaking to God about men and praying for Christ to be revealed and known. Our evangelistic ministries and proclamation of the gospel depends on the Holy Spirit shining a Divine light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ into the soul. If God doesn’t do that, we are speaking words that won’t have any power.

Luke 9:28-29 speaks of Jesus’ 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 face was altered, and his clothing became dazzling white.*

I’m not saying that if you pray enough you will regularly be transfigured in the presence of men. But I do believe if we want God’s glory to be seen radiantly through us then we must be cultivating regular times in the presence of His glory—seeking Him with our Bibles open, with God’s revelation of His Word before our faces—saying, “God, show me Who You are. Reveal Yourself in and through me.”

Jesus prayed not only before His ministries but also after the ministries succeeded. Luke 10:17-21 says, *“The seventy-two returned with joy, saying, ‘Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name!’ And he said to them, ‘I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven...’*”

As the ministry of the gospel is going forward, Jesus’ response is not to pat all His disciples on the back for the great work they have done but to pray and thank God for the great work He has done. Look at verse 21: *“In that same hour he rejoiced in the Holy Spirit and said, ‘I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will.’”*

Jesus recognizes that everything of success in the ministry is from God. *“For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen”* (Romans 11:36). His prayerfulness was such an example to His disciples that we read in Luke 11:1, *“Now Jesus was praying in a certain place, and when he finished, one of his disciples said to him, ‘Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples.’”* There is such a depth, reality and closeness to God in Jesus that His disciples felt they had never really learned how to pray when they saw Jesus praying.

You may have someone in your life like this who—whenever you are with them—reflects the presence of God to you. For me, that is Pastor John Sale. When I met him around the age of 21 at a wedding, his prayerfulness riveted my attention. I wanted to be like him. I was in California just a year ago, visiting him and his church. When we got out of church, I was outside (in January) in their foyer and a woman from the congregation said to me when Pastor John was not listening, “He is like the breath of Jesus to us.” His prayers—even more than his sermons—have impressed me. He is a good preacher. But when we got out of church that Sunday, my wife Kate said, “Just being there to hear Pastor John pray was worth the whole trip.” It left such an impression on us.

For what do you want to be known? For your athletic prowess, financial wisdom, business success, great teaching or preaching? Or do you want to be known for your nearness to God and being a person who walks with God—whose walk with God is so compelling it is contagious? That is the way Jesus was. His nearness to God compelled His disciples to say, *“Teach us to pray...”* E. M. Bounds said, “Certainly if we are His, if we love Him, if we live for Him, and if we live close to Him, we will catch the contagion of His praying life, both on earth and in Heaven.” May that be true. Lord Jesus, we want to catch the contagion of Your praying life. Do that in us.

Finally, let’s move to the end of Jesus’ life in the Gospel of Luke. Have you ever considered that you owe your salvation to the prayer life of Jesus? It was His sufferings, death and blood that purchased our salvation but Luke 22:39-49 makes it clear it was His prayers that prepared Him to pay the price for our salvation. We cannot fathom what was going on inside the Garden of Gethsemane as the Son poured

out His heart to the Father. But we know it was through His praying that Jesus was strengthened to go the cross, despise its shame and sit down at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty on high.

We read in the sacred and holy narrative of the Garden: *“And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly; and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground”* (Luke 22:44). Hebrews 5:7 says, *“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 because of his reverence.”* It was because of this submission to His Father’s will in prayer that Jesus was strengthened to go to the cross with unruffled dignity, calm composure and unrelenting determination. His strength to die for us came as the Holy Spirit and angels from Heaven strengthened Him in prayer. If Jesus would not bear His cross without preparing Himself in prayer; how will you take up your cross, deny yourself and follow Him daily without prayer?

Christ died praying. He prayed for others, *“Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do”* (Luke 23:34). Here are the last words that come from Jesus’ mouth when darkness covers the whole land, the sun’s light fails and the curtain of the temple is torn in two. *“Then Jesus, calling out with a loud voice, said, “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!” And having said this he breathed his last”* (Verse 46). I want prayer to be such a vital, regular part of my life that when I come to die, my instinct is to die praying to my Father; committing myself, my spirit and all that I am to His mercy.

Prayer is the Christian’s vital breath,  
The Christian’s native air,  
His watchword at the gates of death;  
He enters Heav’n with prayer.

(From Prayer is the Soul’s Sincere Desire by James Montgomery, 1818)

Jesus entered Heaven by prayer. Thankfully, that’s not the last prayer Jesus prayed. The book of Hebrews tells us He is unlike all the other High priests. *“...they were prevented by death from continuing in office, but he holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues forever. Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them”* (Hebrews 7:23-25). He is praying now at the right hand of the Father.

Before the throne of God above, I have a strong, a perfect plea  
A Great High Priest Whose Name is Love, Who ever lives and pleads for me!

(From Before the Throne of God Above by Charitie Bancroft, 1863)

That gives me hope. Though I have been prayerless, I can lean on One Who is the perfect Man of Prayer. I am united to Him. He covers my sins and cleanses me even of the guilt of my prayerlessness. Because He is prayerful. Because it was not only His honor on earth but now it is also His honor in

Heaven to make intercession, I can look to Him and the help of His Spirit to teach me to pray and learn to live as Jesus did.

Friends, if Jesus needed to pray, so much more do we. A prayerless life is an awful vacuum. It makes you a very visible and vulnerable target for the enemy and squanders many precious opportunities for blessing. Let's look to Jesus, lean on Him in His perfect prayerfulness where we fail. Let's not be defeated or discouraged but instead be encouraged that He is able to teach us to pray. One of the reasons He came from Heaven to earth was to teach us how to live a life of constant dependence on our Father. I want you to think about your temptations—the battles you face—manifold traps that you may not be aware of, set to trip you up. Cry out to God, “Lord, lead us not into temptation. Deliver us from the evil one.” Arm yourself for battle through prayer.

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