

Jesus, the Man of Prayer

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[0 : 0 0] I was surprised to find myself here tonight. I was enjoying being retired and sitting listening to other people. But Derek, just before he went off on holiday, asked if I would come here this evening and say something about prayer. This is obviously a way that St. Columbus involves and integrates new people. So if you've been coming here for more than six weeks and you haven't been asked to preach yet, speak to Corey and he will add you to the roster. I'd like you to turn to Luke 3 and verse 21 as we begin. You'll be lulled into false sense of security with three texts that are actually ten and then a conclusion.

But I'll try and run through them as quickly as I can. We're going to look at the prayer life of Jesus in the Gospel of Luke, just touching on some of the key things that Luke says about the story of Jesus and the prayer life of Jesus. There'd be many other ways of doing this. One way would be to look at the great prayer in John 17, which you have done on Sunday evenings recently. Another might be to look at the Psalms. Many of the Psalms viewed from a particular perspective are actually the prayers of Jesus prophetically and prayers that Jesus of course prayed in his life on earth. But what we're going to do is go through the story of Luke and just hit some of the key places where Luke mentions the praying of Jesus. Let me begin with a story. Kathy and I haven't traveled very much at all. But I did once take her to Paris. It was actually because friends of ours were going to Paris for three days and they said, would you like to come with us? So I thought, yeah, we would like to come with you. And one thing Kathy really wanted to see was the

Mona Lisa. So we went to Louvre in the middle of the days we were there and eventually we got to this painting. It seemed a bit small to me, but never mind. There it was. And loads of people milling around and Kathy's there looking at the painting. As I looked at her, I was about to move away and she's crying. And I said, why in earth are you crying? Because I'm sensitive like that. And she says, because I'm here, the Mona Lisa. I said, you've seen the Mona Lisa hundreds of times pictures and television. She said, but here I am. And I never thought I'd be here in the presence of the real thing. And I think that as I look at the prayer life of Jesus as we think about our own prayer. But in the story of Jesus, as we hear and overhear Jesus praying, we're aware that we're in the presence of the real thing, the real deal. Now I want to take you through, as I said, 10 passages in Luke as we focus on Jesus personal private praying. There's another area of prayer and Luke that we might look at Jesus involvement in corporate prayer references to his attending the synagogue or the temple, which he describes as a house of prayer. But that's a study, maybe for another time. But here we're focusing on the personal prayer life of Jesus. So numbers one to 10,

I may have to speed up a bit as we get towards the end. Here's Jesus in Luke 3 21, 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 and bodily form like a dove. The voice came from heaven, you're my beloved son with you. I am well pleased. Now here is Luke recounting the beginning of the public ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ. And here is Jesus identifying himself with his people as he is baptized in these waters, waters that prefigure the judgment that he would know on the cross. And Luke wants to make the point that the ministry of Jesus begins in prayer. Here is Jesus being specially anointed for his messianic ministry. And here he is praying about that ministry. We have as you know here the equipping of the Holy

Spirit for Jesus. Jesus would have known the ministry of the Spirit of course before this time. If Luke tells us at the very beginning of his gospel that John the Baptist was filled from his mother's womb, then Jesus was filled from his mother's womb. But here there's a special specific messianic anointing for the ministry that Jesus is undertaking. And here also there's tremendous encouragement from Jesus in the voice of the Father from heaven.

[6 : 06] And what amazing help that would have been to Jesus as he knows the Father fulfilling his promise to give him the special ministry of the Spirit. Now without going into this in any detail, I want you to understand at the very outset that the prayer life of Jesus is part of his obedience as the servant. Jesus is the Son as the voice says from heaven.

But the voice also says with you I am well pleased, which takes us to the language of Isaiah 42 and verse 1. Behold my servant whom I uphold, my chosen in whom my soul delights and who I am pleased, I have put my spirit upon him. In these moments of baptism Jesus knew that the promise was being fulfilled, that the Father would uphold his servant's Son through the ministry of the Holy Spirit. And so the prayer life of Jesus did be set in that context of his dependence. Jesus is the man of faith. He's the man of prayer.

He's the servant who obeys and depends on the ministry of the Holy Spirit as he regularly communes with his Father in prayer. Just one other detail here and I'll move on. It's interesting to me that when you think about Luke writing a Gospel and the Acts of the Apostles that there's this note of prayer and the anointing of the Spirit early on in each. In Luke's Gospel here it's prayer as Jesus is being anointed by the Spirit for his unique ministry. Have you ever thought that in Acts we also have people praying and then they, the church, is anointed by the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost for her ministry. The praying Jesus anointed for his ministry, praying church anointed for her ministry and all of us to continue in prayer. Number two, chapter five and verse sixteen. This is just like a Bible study running through. In fact you might note these references and maybe use them in a Bible study sometime. Five, sixteen. But he, Jesus, would withdraw to desolate places and pray. Now this is the kind of statement in Luke that you could easily run over. It's just ending a story and then you move on to the next one. But it's a very important statement and we should linger over it for a minute or two because it's telling us that Jesus prayed all the time. He prayed regularly, habitually, even as we see here in the midst of a very, very busy life. He would regularly withdraw to lonely, quiet places for prayer, for communion with his father. So it's the pattern of his life.

This translation has, he would withdraw to desolate places. Other translations make it a little more obvious that this is an ongoing thing. But he was withdrawing to lonely places and praying. He was doing it all the time. He was always looking for time and space when he could just get away in his own, even if just for a few minutes, and pray in communion with his father. It also reminds us, of course, that Jesus always practices what he preaches.

That secret prayer has such a place in his teaching and so also in his practice. Remember the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew chapter six, where he speaks about those who love to stand and show off making element prayers at the street corners. They want to be seen by men and they have their reward of men. But Jesus says, you find quiet places and you close the door where nobody knows that you're praying and you talk to your father in secret and your father will reward you. And here's the beauty of the life of Jesus that he always does what he asks us to do. He is never less than perfect in his own practice of what he preaches to others. So this is the pattern of his life. He's always withdrawing to quiet places and praying to his father. Number three, chapter six and verse 12. In these days, he went out to the mountain to pray and all night he continued in prayer to God. Here Jesus spends a whole night in prayer. And we only read of this kind of thing once as far as I can see in the gospel of Luke. But we do read it once in the gospel of Luke. So Jesus did it here. Maybe he did it on other occasions too. He certainly did on one or two other occasions. The point I think is that Jesus is ready always to give prayer the time and space it needs at any particular point in his life. Sometimes it's a quick one phrase prayer to heaven. We see these in the gospels. Other times it needs a whole night in prayer to God. He gives whatever is needed at the time. We don't know what he was praying about. I think there are clues in the context preceding and following. You can see that the preceding context is that of growing opposition and hostility. See in verse 11 they were filled with fury and discussed with one another what they might do to Jesus.

[13 : 21] You've got to be back to verse 17. Each of the following stories from 517 right up to this point is some controversy or includes some controversy with the enemies of Jesus.

And their opposition is mounting and their fury is growing. And of course one day they're going to kill this Jesus. So maybe Jesus is withdrawing in prayer because of that mounting opposition to him. He needs to spend time in prayer and to find the strength that he needs from the spirit. Maybe also particularly the following context hints at why he's praying as soon as he comes down from the mountain. He calls the 12 very specifically. This is a momentous choice for his ministry and for the future. And so my assumption is that particularly during this night of prayer he was praying for guidance as he asked for the spirit leading that he would know who to choose. And after a night of prayer he chooses them no doubt also having been praying over them and over their ministry. You might want to think yourselves about whether it's appropriate for us sometimes to spend a long time in prayer. I'm not going to prescribe for anyone what they should do and when. But each of us should ask is there ever a time when we so need strength in the crisis that several hours of prayer is needed.

Or there's such a momentous decision facing us that will change our life one way or the other that we spend a few hours in prayer before we make that decision. It also reminds us I think of another principle in prayer. That Jesus here only retreats. We use that word retreat in prayer. That Jesus retreats in prayer to advance in service. Somebody has said that the only retreat that the Christian church should engage in is prayer retreat for advance in service. Certainly that's what Jesus does. Number four. Chapter nine, 28 and 29, the Transfiguration story. There's actually another reference in Chapter nine.

We're not going to look at it. But in verse 18, now it happened as he was praying alone. The disciples were with him. They're obviously nearby. And then there's the great confession of Peter. But let me jump to 28 and 29. 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. Again, this is a tremendously important moment for Jesus and tremendously encouraging one as he looks towards the cross. There are visitors from heaven and they speak about the cross. Verse 31, they spoke of his departure. I think it was Corey recently who said that this is the word Exodus. They're talking about Jesus death that he was going to accomplish at Jerusalem, fulfilling the Exodus pattern. And so two visitors come from heaven and they're saying to Jesus, heaven is obsessed with what you're doing. They come to encourage him as he's moving inexorably towards the cross. Then, of course, there's the voice from heaven at the end of the story. Towards the end of the story, my son, my chosen one, listened to him. Again, tremendous encouragement for Jesus.

[17 : 32] He takes Peter, James and John with him as companions, perhaps for fellowship and prayer. And perhaps also as witnesses so they would be able to see his glory and report on it later on. Moses and Elijah in the passing, you'll remember, each had mountaintop experiences of God. And here they have another mountaintop experience of God, God in the flesh as they come to speak with Jesus and to encourage him. If I was still in the Isle of Lewis, I couldn't help but say something about mountaintop experiences. I don't know if you talk that way. People in Lewis talk that way, going on top of the mountain or coming down the mountain. And here in prayer is a mountaintop experience for Jesus and these disciples. And Peter wants to prolong this experience because it's so amazing, so mind-blowingly glorious. But of course, Jesus says, we've got to go back down the mountain into the world with all its hostility. And he's immediately faced in the next story by the horrors of the pit as he has to deal with a possessed boy. So the pattern is, yes, we can have amazing experiences of the glory of Jesus. Maybe in a week of prayer, we'll have amazing experiences. But these are so that we might come back down the mountain and in the strength that we have received be followers of Jesus and witnesses to Jesus in the challenging workaday world.

Number five, chapter 10 and verse 21. In that same hour, Jesus 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 in understanding and revealed them to little children and so on. In this verse, Jesus is filled with joy through the ministry of the Holy Spirit. We know that it's part of the fruit of the spirit, joy. And here is Jesus, the man filled with the joy of the spirit. And he praises his father in prayer. And we have that short prayer given to us. Interesting to me that he praises the father for his sovereignty. Sometimes we talk because of sovereignty where a problem. If God is sovereign, for example, why pray? That's an issue, maybe for another time. But here Jesus praises the father for his sovereignty.

And I think if I can refer again to the island that I've just left, it was something I learned in these recent years helping out in the church. I was an associate. I was the poor man's courier in the congregation of Bach and Lewis. And I learned a lot about sovereignty, especially in listening to people's prayers as they celebrated the sovereignty of God. These people rest in the wisdom of God's decree, God's plan, God's overruling providence. They're always talking about it. Of course, I know there's a danger sometimes for some in doing that, that you could be paralysed by that. You wouldn't do anything because God is sovereign. But that's not the logic that I heard from the best exponents of that kind of theology. And it's not the logic of the Bible. It's not the logic of Jesus. Jesus is thrilled that there's a sovereign father in heaven who will work out his purposes of grace and who will have the victory through the gospel. And so here Jesus rejoices in the spirit. The spirit moves him to pray. Another whole area of study would be the spirit and prayer. If you glance across the page in chapter 11 and verse 11, as we pray, the father gives the spirit to those who ask him. We pray and we receive more of the spirit. You see the two-way thing? Jesus in the spirit is led to pray. We in prayer can receive more of the spirit. There's two-way movement all the time between spirit and prayer, prayer and the spirit. But we'd better move on.

Verse 6, beginning of chapter 11, Luke 11 verse 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 and he taught them what we know as the Lord's prayer. The specific reason given in the text for them asking for help is that John did this with his disciples.

All the rabbis we learn from New Testament scholars did this with their disciples. There's evidence from that ancient world and after that you could tell whose disciples, some of which rabbi had which disciples, you would hear them pray and you would know, well, that's rabbi so and so and that's rabbi so and so because these rabbis had taught their own group of disciples, followers, how to pray and they were distinctive in that. And here are Jesus' disciples saying, teach us to pray. Surely certainly because they had never heard prayers like the prayers of Jesus and they want Jesus to teach them how to pray because no man has ever prayed like this man and they would just love to be able to pray with just a little of the kind of spiritual heartfelt skill that this Jesus uses in prayer and so they beg him to ask for teaching and prayer and then he gives the Lord's prayer that we're going to be using over the next week as a framework. It's a prayer we can pray but it's also a model prayer giving us a framework for our prayers and it's interesting that Jesus gives such a short prayer as a model prayer. He often criticizes people for their many, many words in prayer and he wants his disciples to pray simple prayers, not all prayers that show off but prayers that really mean what they say. I'm conscious of everything I say I would like to qualify and explain a bit more about number seven. Let's jump quite a bit. Chapter 22 and verse 32. Simon, Simon behold Satan demanded to have you that he might sift you like wheat but I prayed for you that your faith may not fail and when you have turned again strengthen your brothers. How can we be sure that Jesus prayed for individual people and for their specific needs? Well this verse tells us that he did. You can see from the footnote if you have the ESV that part of it is plural. Simon,

[26 : 13] Simon behold Satan demanded to have you disciples in the plural but he might sift you disciples like wheat but Simon be assured that I prayed for you as an individual. I prayed for you Simon Peter that your individual faith might not fail completely in the crisis that you are about to face. So Jesus is saying to Simon I've been praying for you and this specific area of your spiritual life because I know the crisis that's coming and Jesus wanted Simon to have the assurance and I think it was very important to Simon in the hours to come that Jesus had been remembering him and Jesus loved him and prayed for him. That would lead us to discuss further about praying for specific people and needs and how we remember needs and so on but let's move on. Number eight, Chapter 22 still verses 39 and following the Mount of Olives. Verse 42, Father if you're willing remove this cup from me nevertheless not my will but yours be done. Again this is a very rich and deep passage but here as

Jesus praying in anguish and praying on through his anguish the cup is the Old Testament symbol of judgment from God and the cup was drunk given to evil people in judgment to drink of God's judgment but here as Jesus saying I've come to take the cup in all its bitterness and I'm going to drink that judgment to its very dregs. He teaches us here about prayer in relation to our wrestling with God and really asking God for what's in our hearts and then at the same time being willing to say it's your will and your will be done.

Our logic might say well I'm either going to ask or I'm going to accept but not both. I'm either going to wrestle in prayer with God and say not this or I'm just going to say okay your will be done but Jesus does both in this prayer doesn't he? He wrestles with the Father's will for him and he expresses that in anguish in three cycles of prayer but he also accepts the will of the Father for him. Very important teaching here about prayer and God's will that we don't have time to go into but I just want to highlight one other thing here. The importance of prayer preparing us for testing. You see in verse 40 Jesus to the disciples pray you won't enter into temptation. They're going to face a test and Jesus is warning them don't give up on prayer here of all times to give up on prayer pray that you won't enter into temptation failing the test the same thing that verse 46 pray that you won't enter into temptation and you see the pattern here in relation to testing and prayer. Jesus prays and in verses 47 and following he is at where passes the test with flying colors. The disciples are called to prayer and they do not pray.

Next story verses 54 and following Peter denies and the rest run away and flee does seem to me here to be a pattern being taught us. One person prays and he comes through the test others fail to pray and they collapse under the test prayer readies us for the challenges and tests of life. Number nine Jesus praying on the cross chapter 23 verse 34 father forgive them for they know not what they do and verse 46 father into your hands I commit my spirit.

Two amazing prayers on the cross Jesus praying for the forgiveness of those who are nailing him to the cross and then finally committing his spirit into the father's safe keeping.

[31 : 29] It was love that brought him from heaven and love carries him through his ministry and love is taking him to that cross and even in these moments when these soldiers would always have heard people cursing them as they nailed them to the wood and here uniquely they hear somebody praying for them as they nail him to the wood. It's an incredible prayer and then as committal of a spirit. I said it here before but it's a few years ago in a very different occasion. Jesus commits a spirit to the father. I think he's praying a prayer that he was taught to pray as a little boy but he adds the word father. It comes from Psalm 31 and verse 5 into your hands I commit my spirit and many Jewish mothers when they were looking for a little prayer to teach their children when they were too young to learn more than a few words would teach them that prayer to say at night into your hands I commit my spirit. You might think that's a strange one to teach them but it's very very like one that some of us were taught a long time ago. As I lay me down to sleep

I pray the Lord my soul my spirit to keep and if I die before I wake I pray the Lord my soul my spirit to take. Jesus on the cross prays the prayer that his mum taught him to say at night when he was a little boy because he's going to sleep in peace prayerful peace on the cross as he dies with a crisis over. Please also note that Luke at the end of act seven gives us the death of Stephen and it seems that Stephen is following the Lord's example in prayer in death cruel death. Remember Stephen as they were stoning him he called out Lord Jesus receive my spirit isn't that what Jesus said and falling to his knees he cried with a loud voice Lord do not hold this sin against him. The two prayers Stephen prays to Jesus are the two prayers Jesus prayed to his father on the cross. We're to follow the example of Jesus in prayer and we can pray to Jesus the same prayers Jesus prayed to the father. Then finally and then a word and conclusion the very end of the Gospel

Luke 24 50 to 51 he led them out as far as Bethany and lifting up his hands he blessed them and while he blessed them he parted from and was carried up into heaven. I think this is very relevant to the prayer ministry of Jesus. Jesus ascends with his hands lifted and priestly blessing over his disciples and as he ascends into the cloud of God's presence and then is translated to heaven. The last thing they see is Jesus with his hands outstretched as a priest as a high priest and that's a sign that Jesus is saying I am taking my priestly prayer ministry to heaven for you. That's very significant for our prayers now to remember that not only do we have somebody who prayed for us on earth but we have somebody Jesus who's praying for us in heaven. We learn that in Hebrews the end of Hebrews 4 towards the end of Hebrews 7 Jesus ever lives to make intercession for us. I wanted to say a bit more about that but I think my time went about five minutes ago so I'll leave that maybe for another occasion but I think I'll finish with just this point which I really want to make. I think it's very important and when it was pointed out to me many years ago I found it transformative. We often feel very guilty about our prayer lives and we want to pray more, we want to pray better prayers, we want to spend more time in prayer and see more answers to our prayers and we have the assurance that as we come in the name of Jesus through the blood of Jesus our prayers are heard in heaven and we have the assurance always that when we fail in prayer Jesus never fails and he's always remembering us.

But the key thing that I want to say in conclusion is that this perfect prayer life of Jesus is yours. All of us feel our prayer lives are inadequate. That's true. That's always going to be true but please leave this place tonight remembering that there's another sense in which you have a perfect prayer life because I said at the beginning that Jesus prays as the servant. Jesus came to live the life that we could never live. Jesus came to pray the prayer life that we could never pray and he prayed the perfect prayer life and all the obedience of Jesus as the servant including his praying is credited to you the moment you trust in Jesus. You have the righteousness of Jesus credited, reckoned and put to your account. So tonight please rest in that. However inadequate you feel your prayer life is day by day. Remember that you have a perfect prayer life credited to you. Jesus lived a life of complete righteousness including a completely prayerful life without sin. He lived that for you and that is yours and that will be yours forever if your faith is in the Lord Jesus. So please tonight rest in the prayers of Jesus on earth because these are yours and rest today and in all your tomorrows in the ongoing prayer life of Jesus in heaven.

The Jesus who makes your prayers perfect before the throne and the Jesus who ever lives to make intercession for you. The prayer life of Jesus then now and in the future is vital for our salvation and for our encouragement. Let's pray briefly. Lord we thank you for this opportunity to run through the gospel of Luke and focus on Jesus and especially on his praying. We thank you for this beautiful life of prayer and we thank you that that life is ours by faith in Jesus and as we look up we thank you that Jesus continues to remember us that he never slumbers nor sleeps that he never forgets his children on earth. So help us to rest in the interceding high priest in heaven and help us not simply to follow

[39 : 24] Jesus in a life of prayer but help us to hear Jesus calling on us join me in a life of prayer. May we run to join Jesus in this as in everything else for his glory. Amen.