



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Systematic Theology

TRANSCRIPT

“The Necessity of Prayer”

[Prayer] Father we turn again to Thee and to the study of the Scriptures. We pray that as we consider the doctrines that concern prayer that Thou will minister to us from the word building us up in our most holy faith, edifying us and strengthening us, and motivating us toward the life of fellowship with Thee. We realize Lord that we cannot ever really know anything about prayer until we pray. And so may our studies lead to that end. We commit this hour to Thee now in Jesus name. Amen.

[Message] Our subject for tonight, which is the seventh in our series on the theology of prayer or John Calvin at the throne of grace, is the prayer life of Jesus, the supreme argument for prayer or the necessity of prayer. And I think there is one topic that we should consider before we conclude the series. And so next Tuesday night if everything goes well, that is a euphemism for if God wills, then we are going to consider the subject importunate prayer. Is it necessary? I think this is a problem that we all have, “Why should we keep praying the same petition over and over again. Is not once enough?” And so that is the topic that will conclude our series on prayer next Tuesday night the Lord willing.

The prayer life of Jesus, the supreme argument for prayer, or the necessity of prayer. Will you turn in your New Testaments to Luke chapter 6 and listen as I read verses 12 through 16 of the sixth chapter? Luke chapter 6, verse 12 through verse 16,

“It was at this time that He went off to the mountain to pray, and He spent the whole night in prayer to God. And when day came, He called His disciples to Him and chose twelve of them, whom He also named as apostles: Simon, whom He also named Peter, and Andrew his brother; and James and John; and Philip and Bartholomew; and Matthew and Thomas; James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon who was called the Zealot; Judas the son of James, and Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor.”

If a careful reader were to go through the gospels marking passages referring to prayer, he would soon learn that in our Lord’s deed and in his words, prayer predominates. And each crisis of our Lord’s career there is evidence that he committed the crisis to the Lord in prayer. And as you know, remembering the last words, that our Lord uttered in his earthly career when he died he died with a prayer upon his lips, “Father into Thy hand I commit my Spirit.”

John Bailey, who was professor of divinity at the University of Edinburgh, has written in one of his books entitled *Christian Devotion*, “No where in the religious literature of the world can we find stronger statements about the power and efficacy of prayer than we find in the preaching of Jesus.” I think that is a fair statement. It is often thought that everybody believes in prayer. That is not true. The stoics, for example, did not believe in prayer. They thought it was a useless endeavor.

Now we have considered all the objections to prayer from the standpoint of reason and the standpoint of feeling that usually trouble individuals who know anything about the Bible and its teaching on prayer. And I think for just a moment I would like to argue the necessity and importance of prayer from similar perspectives. For example, it is

important that we pray because it is God’s explicit command. Our Lord, for example, in Luke chapter 18, verse 1 apparently gave his disciples instructions that they are always to pray. Our text reads in chapter 18, verse 1, “Now He was telling them a parable to show that at all times they ought to pray and not to lose heart,” Paul in 1 Timothy chapter 2 says that he desires that men lift up holy hands in prayer on all occasions.

Prayer is the language of dependence. If it is true that we are men, creatures, dependent upon God, it is natural for us to pray, for prayer is the language of dependence. I think this is the reason people kneel when they pray, because to pray and to be dependent, well these are things that go together. Prayer is the language of guilt. It is the language of worship. And so if we are to think of prayer from the standpoint of reason and feeling, we should want to pray. It is also an instinct of our human nature.

Now I don’t know whether you stay up late at night like I do but I do. And last night instead of Johnny Carson, Pat Boone was master of ceremonies on the *Tonight Show*. And one of the guests was Clint Walker. Now, Clint Walker, as you know, there’s a great big fellow about six-foot five and when he came on and sat down Pat Boone asked him a question about an experience he had had with some skis a few months back. It appears that he was skiing down one of the mountains somewhere and in the course of skiing down he managed to get his feet tangled up with his equipment, but anyway he fell. But as he fell, his ski pole, for some reason or other, it got twisted up and it turned around completely so that the ski pole -- the end of the ski pole went squarely in the center of his chest and as you know that is about that long and about that thick.

And so it went right straight in and the only thing that saved him from being impaled on that ski pole was the fact that it has a little guarding ring about it, as you know. And he had the ski pole with him and it was bent like this and he went on to speak about the fact that he almost died. He was about three hours before they could get him to the hospital and he was -- he said, dying. And he did remember -- and this was the thing that Pat Boone was trying to get out of him -- that at that point when he realized

that was dying he did turn to some thing and say to some thing that he thought that he would like to live again.

Now I’m repeating his words broadly. I don’t remember exactly word for word what he said but I do remember specifically that he kept talking about this some thing that saved him from death. And like all preachers, he then turned to the audience and he recommended to them if ever they were in trouble, as he was in trouble, that there was an “it,” an “it” to which they could turn. Now I’m not trying to suggest that Clint Walker is a new Christian -- whether he’s a Christian or not -- that is not my duty to judge or to say. It certainly appears to me he has not grown very much in grace if he is still speaking about God as an “it.” [Laughter] But the thing that interested me about it was that in the moment of what he thought was his dying moment; he turned instinctively to God, to that it, which was beyond him in prayer.

Now we could also say that prayer is the moral discipline of the soul. One of the reasons that God has us pray is it by means of prayer we are spiritually disciplined. And finally, it is the point of union between the divine and human agencies. What I mean by that is this -- when we study the Bible we know the Bible seems to suggest to us that the work of salvation is totally the work of God, but on the other hand, the Bible instructs us in many ways exhorting us to do certain things. Christians have a great deal of difficulty reconciling the fact that the Bible says the work of salvation is totally the work of God, but at the same time we are exhorted specifically to do certain things which are said to be pleasing to God.

Now it is at the point of prayer. It is at this juncture that we have the union of the divine and human agencies, for it is truly God who does it all but he has ordained the things that he does for men should be done often through prayer. And so it is reasonable then, it is reasonable from the standpoint from our own spiritual instincts and from the standpoint of reason to pray. But once we have argued the reasons why prayer seems to be senseless and why prayer seems to be very sensible, we come again to this fact, which

to me is the climax of all of the argument and it is this; that the one great unanswerable argument for prayer is our Lord Jesus Christ. That is, of course, if we recognize the Bible to contain the message of God. Although he is earth’s sovereign and divine soul, he prayed.

Now that -- it seems to me -- is the unanswerable argument for prayer. If Jesus Christ who was very god, a very god as well as very man, a very man should pray, then, of course, I should expect to pray also. Now John tells us in the second chapter of his first epistle, “The one who says abides in him ought himself to walk in the same manner as he walked.” And so I think that that is sufficient argument for prayer. Jesus Christ who is, I say, the sovereign and divine soul of earth, prayed.

I don’t know whether you realize or not but Jesus Christ is absolutely unique. It is remarkable the uniqueness of our Lord Jesus Christ. Great music revolves around him. There is no greater music than the music of Handel’s *Messiah*. Great architecture is consecrated to him, and anyone who has traveled Europe and who has seen the great cathedrals of Europe, some of the greatest illustrations of architecture in the world know that those cathedrals were dedicated to him. Great art such as Raphael’s *Madonna* or Munkacsy’s *Christ Before Pilate*, these are things that are consecrated to Jesus Christ. It is out of him that these things have come.

In fact, it seems to me that so deep is our Lord’s impression upon human history that it would be utterly impossible to account for it, were it not for the fact that Jesus Christ is different. Someone has said, “Truth seems to demand for him some ultimate honor, so deep are his self-revealings, so unaccountable otherwise his grip on history, so inescapable his aliveness for who had dared to deeply ponder him; but apart from all titles, he is earth’s sovereign soul. His thirty years of life bring forth harvest of life generation on generation.”

This aloneness of Jesus Christ, which Carnegie Simpson has spoken about, is an aloneness in two degrees. The first, our Lord’s whole manner betrays that his moral

experience and that of other men are not parallel. He is not the same as you and I are. For example, he who soul searchingly told others the evil within our hearts made no confession of evil himself. He who gave the despairing sinner every other token of brotherhood never spoke of himself as if he were born or had been in the same case. He was so morally sensitive that he has become the supreme conscious of mankind. And yet he challenges men to convict him of sin. He tells men that they should repent, but he does not repent of sin himself.

On the other hand, looking at it from the positive standpoint, he says that others are sick. He not only is not sick but he is in health and is the good or great physician. Other's lives are forfeit. His life is not only not forfeited, but it is his own. And it he makes the ransom for the lives of others. All other men are sinners. Jesus Christ does not only not a sinner but he is the Savior. And so the fact that Jesus Christ is so totally different underscores his deity, his uniqueness. He is not like you and me. He is earth's sovereign and divine spirit and he prayed. And it seems to me that that really settles the question of prayer.

Now if we who live out west -- Texas is west, at least to a Southeasterner -- we who live out west know something about the mesas. You may know something about the mesas of New Mexico and Colorado. I don't know too much about them but I do know that the Indians, such as the Acoma Indians, lived on those mesas. They lived on those mesas apparently because it afforded them protection. There are, after all, there were the Navahos in the south or north and the Apaches about, and so the mesas were ways in which they could escape. They provided them safety and some of those mesas you could only ascend to a narrow rock staircase so that a few men could defend them. And they lived on them, and there they obtained safety. Not only that, they also obtained sustenance. From time to time, they would take soil to the top and since the rock was cool, the ground was not parched like the ground down in the valley and so it was a

means of sustenance for them. And I think also it must have been a means of stability to them because no matter what happened about, the mesa still stayed firm.

Now it has been said prayer is our great mesa, for it is the source of stability. It is the source of sustenance and it is our safety spiritually. Well let’s look at our outline and consider first the pre-eminence of prayer in Jesus’ life. Let me just -- instead of looking at all of the passage of Scripture that we could look at tonight -- let me just remind you of the place of prayer in the crises of our Lord’s life. You may remember that there is no direct reference to the fact that Jesus prayed when he was born. It certainly would seem an unusual thing that an infant who could not talk yet should pray.

Now, there is, however, a very startling passage in the tenth chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews, which I confess has always puzzled me. And it still puzzles me a little bit for the writer to the epistle referring to our Lord Jesus in the tenth chapter says, “Therefore, when he comes into the world sacrifice and offering thou hast desired but a body thou hast prepared for me. Then I said behold I have come in the role of the book it is written of me to do thy will oh God.”

Now notice the statement, “Therefore when he comes into the world he says.” If that is a reference to our Lord uttering something even as the eternal Son before he assumes human nature to himself; if that is that, then it may be fair to say that our Lord prayed as he entered into his experience of incarnation. But passing by the birth, over which we may have some question, let’s think for a moment of the baptism of our Lord. And if you remember the description of the baptism of our Lord in the Gospel of Luke, it states that his baptism took place when he was praying.

As a matter of fact -- it is my conviction, I think I am right in this -- that the coming of the Holy Spirit upon our Lord when he was baptized, which was the equipping and enabling of him for his messianic work was probably in answer to our Lord’s prayer. He knew with this mighty task that he had to undertake, his messianic task, it was necessary that he have divine enablement. And so he was praying, praying no doubt the

passages from the Book of Isaiah which spoke of the fact that God would put his Spirit upon the Messiah. And he was praying that that might come to pass.

And as he prayed in his baptismal experience, the Holy Spirit came in the form of a dove in abode upon him. And so his baptism, which began his ministry, he prayed. Luke tells us in the fifth chapter in the sixteenth verse of his gospel that our Lord’s ministry was characterized by prayer and prayer quite often. We read in chapter 5, verse 16, “But Jesus Himself would often slip away to the wilderness and pray.” So from time to time as our Lord carried out his task, he slipped off to pray.

Now remember he is the eternal God and yet he finds it necessary to pray. Not only did he pray at these moments in his ministry, but when he chose the twelve, we read that Scripture tonight chapter 6, verse 12; “Before he chose his twelve apostles he went out on the mountain and there he prayed for the whole night.” He spent the whole night in prayer to God. It was of the greatest importance that he should select twelve apostles that had been chosen for that task from the beginning.

And isn’t it an interesting thing that he chose Judas? Now, Judas, in his choice, was the fulfillment of Old Testament Scripture, because the Old Testament had said, “that one of his own familiar friends would lift up his heel against him,” and so our Lord chose Judas and he chose him rightly. So at the point of the choosing of the Twelve he prayed. In his transfiguration, you’ll remember, he went off taking Peter, James and John with him up into the mountain and he prayed.

Now I’m not going to talk about the transfiguration although I know what he said. Now it’s not stated in the Bible and you might say, “Dr. Johnson how do you know.” Well, I just know because I know what he ordinarily prayed and I know what he was concerned about. And I know what that transfiguration scene means. And that transfiguration was the answer of God to the prayer of the Son. It was, in effect, his saying there is going to come a time of glory beyond the cross but the cross is the next event in ministry. Then you’ll remember in the agony of the garden of Gethsemane he

prayed, “Oh my Father if it be possible let this cup pass from me. Nevertheless not my will but Thine be done.” And then when he hung on the cross, he uttered more than one prayer. He prayed, “Father release them for they know not what they do.” And as we have quoted already, “Father into thy hands I commit my spirit.”

Now the death of our Lord did not end his praying. It ended his earthly praying, but it entered -- it was the door to the ministry of prayer in his resurrection state. And ever since our Lord has been at the right hand of the Father he has been praying. There he ever lives to make intercession for us. So I think you can see from this brief review of prayer in the life of our Lord, it is true it is no exaggeration to say that prayer is the breath of our Lord. The highlight of his ministry on the earth was not conference with men but conference with God. I think it should be obvious to us also, that if we are to make any claim to the authority to our Lord Jesus Christ for the various things that we may be doing, we should not forget the fact that he prayed.

It would -- it seems to me to be wrong to say, “Now we must follow the golden rule for Jesus said that we should follow the golden rule if we do not pray.” For prayer is no mere addendum to the teaching of our Lord. It is that which under urged the whole thing. If you hear today modern false prophets saying, “Jesus was a man who was devoted to the poor.” There is evidence that our Lord did have the poor upon his heart, but if you were to say that Jesus is authority for the social programs of today, then I think I should say to you, “Do you pray as Jesus prays?” For you see we cannot really claim our Lord’s authority for things if we do not claim the whole man, his whole teaching. It is no mere addendum to the teaching of our Lord that he prayed. It is part and parcel of everything that he said and did. And so when we refer to the teaching of our Lord, we should be careful to be sure that we are not only claiming that we live by what he says but that we also do what he did, and that is pray.

Well let me move on second to the particulars of his prayer method. There is ample testimony to the fact that Jesus prayed. There is not, however, as much

information about the method and the content of his praying as we would like to have. There are a few outstanding exceptions. There is, for example, the Lord’s Prayer -- the so-called Lord’s Prayer. That is a model prayer and Jesus gave it in order to instruct us in the doctrine of prayer. So far as we know, he never prayed that prayer. In fact, he could not pray all of that prayer for himself. So far as we know, the apostles never prayed that prayer. So far as we know, no one ever prayed that prayer except countless thousand millions of professing Christians who repeated by rote in their Sunday morning eleven o’clock services. But it is a tremendous lesson on prayer and we are to pay attention to it. There is also our Lord’s high priestly prayer in the Gospel of John chapter 17.

Now that is a most unique prayer. It is The Lord’s prayer -- if we were to select one text that is the Lord’s Prayer that would be it, John chapter 17. But we don’t pay a great deal of attention to John chapter 17 because Jesus says some rather strange things there. And we don’t really understand what he meant. For example, he said, “I don’t pray for the world but I pray for those who shall believe on me.”

Now that is something that offends us and we pass it by and we say, “well whatever that means. It’s strange.” And then we do have our Lord’s prayer in Gethsemane and we know precisely what he was praying about there.

Now what can we say then about our Lord’s prayer method. Capital A in our outline is assumptions. And let me test detail, three assumptions, which I have not put on the outline for the simple reason that was the last sheet that I had and did not have enough to put one, two, three under capital A but here they are. Here are our Lord’s assumptions. First of all, the assumption of our Lord in prayer is that God exists. That is the first assumption in our Lord’s prayer method. God exists. We are living in the day when men like to say, “Prove it to me.” We just have a very very difficult time of believing anything unless we have some kind of rational proof. The kind of rational proof that we ourselves particularly like. And so we are living in the days of prove it to me.

Someone has said that kind of mind -- the prove it to me mind -- sits at home to receive all arguments about God. The gravedigger, the mystic, the novelist and the chemist call in turn. The prove it to me mind is scientifically polite to all and serves afternoon tea. When the guest have gone and ponders the arguments and concludes, “I find no convincing proof. I am an agnostic.” Which reminds me -- and you may be reminded of it too -- of the incident some time ago of a popular novelist who in the midst of a public platform was making some comments about God and he was claiming that God did not exist. And so he shouted out in the presence of all so they might hear, “God if you exist strike me dead.” And he waited a little while and when nothing happened, then he turned to the audience and he said, “see God does not exist.” It would have been just as reasonable to infer that God did exist from what he said because only God could have been patient with such stupidity. [Laughter]

Well now the -- our Lord proceeded on the basis of the fact that God exists. And the writer of the epistle of the Hebrews states that specifically. He says, “He that cometh to God must believe that he exists and that he is a rewarder of them that which at least seek him.” The second assumption that Jesus had in his prayer life, is that God is personal. He prayed to a personal God. He did not pray as Alfred North Whitehead, the famous philosopher, to quote the principle of concretion. He did not pray as Paul Tillich, one of our outstanding recent contemporary theologians, to the ground of our being. That was Tillich’s God. He did not pray to the integrating factor in our experience, which was Wurman’s God. He prayed to a personal God. He did not talk to the life essence as some have suggested that we define God; or the power not ourselves that makes for righteousness, as someone else has defined God. Or even the good, the beautiful and the true he prayed, “Father,” the God that he prayed to was a God who existed and he existed as a person.

Now I have a great deal of respect for Alfred North Whitehead and I have a great deal of respect for Paul Tillich. They undoubtedly were unusual men and very gifted men

intellectually. But when it comes to the prayer life of our Lord and the prayer life of a simple Christian, it just does not help us to say that we should define God as the ground of our being. And I think every Christian who gets down upon his knees feels that it is utterly inappropriate to say, “Oh ground of my being.” [Laughter] There is just something about it that is contrary to the inmost being of ourselves.

Now the third thing that Jesus assumed is that the universe is both faithful and flexible. He assumed that we could count on things in this universe. Let me read you a paragraph which I found very good. It is a paragraph -- I hesitate to say who it is because this man is not a member of what I would call the evangelical wing of the Christian church or at least only broadly so -- but he is an outstanding man, a well known man and in this book, at least, has said a number of very good things.

His name is Buttrick and you’ve probably heard of him. He has been pastor of a Presbyterian church, a leading Presbyterian church in New York City. Dr. Buttrick has said that the universe is faithful both for a man and God, we would quickly agree. Invariably, the sun rises in the east. Invariably, spring follows winter. Invariably, Newton’s famous apple falls instead of taking wing. This inflexibility is at once the postulate and native air of the scientific quest. The botanist assumes that an oak tree will not overnight change its identity to become a potato. The astronomer assumes that Saturn will not break out with an attack of the zig zags but will keep its orbit. The chemist assumes that two parts of hydrogen and one part of oxygen will not suddenly become the formula for sulfuric acid but will continue to be the constituent parts of water.

Knowledge would be impossible in an eccentric world. Nay, self-consciousness itself requires a certain constancy in nature and in human nature. If John Smith were one moment Jim Jones and the next moment Bob Clark, life would be much more fantastic than a hall of mirrors. We have sometime failed to see that our freedom and our very prayers can only breath in a faithful scheme. If the sun chose not to rise next Tuesday, if bread suddenly became poisonous, if half the race returned in three days to infancy, if

noses grew six feet long -- and I’m glad he said six feet and not five feet long -- if treachery became a virtue -- in case you don’t know my children kidded me for having a long nose -- if treachery became a virtue, if spring reverted to summer, if gravitation took to drink, the world would be a phantasmagoria and God a surrealist figure seen in a nightmare.

Now I think in the prayer life of our Lord there is an assumption that the universe is both favorable and flexible. That is, it is possible for a God who controls the affairs of this earth to intervene in ways that we do not completely understand. We have not dealt with miracles in this series this time, and so we don’t want to get off into the problem of miracles, but it is nevertheless true that God is able to intervene in the affairs of men. This is one of the assumptions of our Lord.

Now I know it is possible for scientific men to say, “Well what you call answered prayer is only mere coincidence.” And I think we have to say that. I must say a lot of times when Christians come to me and say, “You know I prayed about such and such and the Lord answered my prayer.” And I have just have to frequently -- in order to keep from pouring cold water on what is obviously some spiritual enthusiasm -- I just have to say, “Hmm, that’s nice because they have told what they have prayed and I know that is contrary to the teaching of God’s work.” And so they have said that God answered their prayer.

Then often you know Christians like to think that God has answered our prayer again without any particular justification from the word of God -- I must confess in instances like that I’m inclined to think, “yes it was mere coincidence” -- just mere coincidence. But on the other hand, I remember what William Temple, the Archbishop of Canterbury, said. He said, “Now the events of life may have been miracle incidences. That may be true but I discovered this that the coincidences came much more frequently when I prayed [laughter] and so I continued to pray.”

Now these are the assumptions of our Lord in prayer. I’m not trying to defend them scientifically because that is not the purpose in this lecture. I just want you to notice that they are assumptions of our Lord. He assumes that God existed. He assumed that God is personal. He assumed that the universe is faithful and flexible. It is possible for God to intervene, although, in most of our Lord’s life there is a reliance upon the things that we know to be faithful exhibitions of the providence of God.

Now, his practices, capital B. Let me just detail a few things that characterize our Lord’s Prayer life. First of all, his prayers were reverent. [Repeat] His prayers were reverent. Isn’t it a striking thing that Jesus the Son of God got down upon his knees to pray? Now in the garden of Gethsemane, he not only got down upon his knees but he actually after he had been on his knees for some time, he fell upon his face in the most total, the most abject picture of dependence upon God. We like to think because we think that we’re pretty much in control of affairs that we are our own providence but he did not believe that. His prayers were reverent so he kneeled. He fell upon his face and then he lifted his heart to God and then he said, “Father,” recognizing that he was the Son. He not only prayed Father. He prayed Holy Father. And then he prayed righteous Father. All of these are expressions designed to stress the fact that God is the supreme and controlling force in his life, God the Father.

Second, our Lord’s prayers were scriptural. Now this I think has impressed me a great deal. As I’ve told you over and over again, I’m reading through this New American Standard Bible. I am interested in several things. I’m on -- I only have about two hundred pages left now out of seventeen hundred and thirty pages. And July the first is the deadline. I think I’m going to make it if something doesn’t happen. One of the reasons I’ve been reading through is because I think that any Bible teacher should be able to have upon his lips the textual Scripture. And the phrases and clauses of the word of God should be so common to him that he is able to sight them as the Holy Spirit leads, and as his memory holds up. [Laughter]

I’ve noticed this about the prayers of the Bible. Many of the prayers of the Bible are scriptural not only our Lord’s. For example, Jonah, when he was in the belly of the great fish, he did not sing out, “Abide with me.” If you’ll discover if you’ll study the prayer that Jonah prayed, you will discover that in Jonah chapter 2 from about verse 2 through about verse 9, which represents his prayer, it is almost totally composed of phrases from the word of God.

Now he did not read that prayer. There was no one inside the belly of that great fish to stand by his side and hold the lamp while he read the prayer. So he did not use the prayer book when he prayed. Those were phrases that were common to him. He knew them. He had studied the Scriptures that he had. And apparently had studied them fairly widely, for those phrases come from several sections from the word of God. And I do think this -- I have noticed from experience in dealing with souls of men in my twenty years of pastoral experience -- that when Christians are in trouble, when they are disturbed, when they are in perplexity, when they are in the midst of tragedy, they do not appeal to the songs of our hymnody.

They certainly don’t appeal to do Lord, and things like that. They don’t appeal to the little choruses that we so often like to sing. I’m not against these things. Go ahead and sing them when you’re feeling light and frivolous. That’s all right. Do it. But when they are in difficulty, it is the word of God to which they appeal and which strengthens them and which encourages them. And when a man gets down upon his face before God and he has none of the phrases of the word of God, well then his language is lacking for the life of prayer. Take the Lord’s Prayer, so called. “Our Father which art in heaven. Hallowed be thy name.”

Now if you will go through that short simple prayer and if you will look at the phrases of that prayer and the clauses of that prayer and compare them in your concordance. You don’t have to know Hebrew and Greek to do this. In your concordance with other phrases in the Bible, you will discover even that prayer is largely

a prayer composed from truths of holy Scripture, phrases of holy Scripture. An amazing thing.

And when our Lord prayed, think of his prayers when he died. “My God, my God why hast Thou forsaken me.” Why that’s a citation. That’s a quotation from Psalm 22. “Father into thy hands I commit my spirit.” That’s a quotation from Psalm 31:5. Almost all of those petitions that he uttered, all those statements that he made are statements from Scripture. He made Holy Scripture the food, the daily food, the daily meditation of his life. His prayers were scriptural. Arthur T. Pearson, one of the great Bible teachers of the beginning of the twentieth century, said, “A scriptural form of expression ensures or promotes the scriptural frame of mind.”

Now what I’m telling you, you Christians who are sitting listening to me, what I’m telling you very plainly is, “Read your Bibles. Study your Bibles.” And you will discover that you have the things that will help you in your life of prayer. Third, our Lord’s prayers were regular. Chapter 22, verse 39 of the Gospel of Luke, he went into the garden of Gethsemane, as he was accustomed to. In John chapter 18, verse 2, John says that our Lord oft times resorted to the garden of Gethsemane.

Now when the men asked Judas where Jesus was, he looked at his watch he said, “Ah, he’ll be in the garden of Gethsemane praying about this time.” Even Judas knew where you could expect to find him. His prayer was regular.

Now I’m not going to contend that you ought to pray at night, always or pray in the morning, always or necessarily that your day is totally lost if you have not had one time of prayer during the day. Maybe you have been so busy making so much money during the day you just haven’t had a time to devote a minute or two to a thought about God. You’ve been watching the tape, the ticker tape, and you’ve been watching Xerox or General Motors or Texas Instruments or whatever it is you got your life savings in go up and up and up. And the only thing you could think about is those additional dollars there in your bank account and how wonderful your portfolio is at this point, you men. Well,

there may be a day in which you can get by without God. I doubt it, but nevertheless, I’m not going to legalistically contend that you should pray everyday. When I look at the word of God, the impression I get is that the apostles, our Lord, the prophets and others did daily look to the Lord. We do have injunctions. Pray without ceasing.

Now it means at frequent intervals, of course. Maybe that means you could miss a day. But I do think that our Lord’s prayers were regular. That his prayer life is of tremendous interest to us. Fourth, his prayers were fervent. He prayed, we read in the garden of Gethsemane in the most vivid illustration of the earnestness of his prayer, in an agony. His prayers were fervent.

Now it seems to me again if a man is a man of God, his prayers should be fervent and not perfunctory. Now I’ve had funeral services with men of different ecclesiastical persuasions. And there are several types of ecclesiastical persuasion, which almost without exceptions have ministers who simply, perfunctorily go through the motions of prayer. Now it’s possible to read a prayer in earnestness. Don’t misunderstand me. I’m not speaking about those who read prayers. It is possible to read with a great deal more earnestness than some -- I hear -- reciting a prayer. But I’ve notice about certain ones that they just pray perfunctorily as if they wish they were home five or ten seconds earlier.

Now our prayers should be in earnest. They should be fervored, his word. Fifth, his prayers were definite. I do not think our Lord got together with the Lord and just prayed, as we often pray, of course. He did not pray about sin but as we often do, “Oh God,” as we conclude our prayer and, “forgive us our sins in Jesus name. Amen.” Almost all the elders in the denomination in which I grew up concluded their prayers and, “Forgive our sins in Jesus name. Amen.” That’s the broadest kind of prayer which is really meaningless. I think God likes, just as our Lord prayed definitely, he likes to hear us pray definitely. Jesus prayed regarding the cup.

Now there was no question in the garden of Gethsemane what the cup was. The cup was that cross death. No question but that when he said, “Oh Father if it be possible

let this cup pass from me,” he was referring to death. That was a specific prayer. Now our prayers ought to be specific too. His were specific. His prayers were also both public and private. I don’t know I did not have time to read through the New Testament just to settle this question. I’ll be thinking about it as I finish the New Testament because I’m at the end of the Gospel of John now. I think the stress in our Lord’s praying is on the private side of his prayer, but he did pray in the presence of the apostle.

Now he never said let’s have a prayer meeting and let’s all pray to our Father in heaven. He never said that because, you see, while there is in our Lord’s humanity a very very fine difference between him and them, it is, nevertheless, though as fine as hair, it is as firm and solid as a diamond. And so he never gathered the men together and said let’s have prayer meeting and pray to our God.

As a matter of fact, he gave some instructions to Mary and said, “Now I want you to go and I want you to speak to the apostles and I want you to tell them,” -- and I’m going to look at those words and you think I’m just looking at the Bible so I’ll repeat it exactly. No it isn’t that really. It’s because I’ve forgotten exactly [Laughter] what it is. But he was speaking to Mary and he said now to her, “Stop clinging for I have not ascended to the Father but go to my brethren and say to them I ascend to our Father. No I ascend to my Father and your Father and our God. No, and my God and your God.” In other words, even there he made just enough of a distinction to let us know that he is unique. He is one of us but he’s the first born among many brethren.

Now while our Lord prayed privately, he told us to enter into our closets and pray. Don’t take that literally. That can be a little suffocating. [Laughter] I do know of a man who attempted to carry that out literally. It’s better to do it that way then to not pray, but surely that means in a private place. And so our Lord’s prayers were public and private. Have you ever noticed what Jesus did when he came into the cities where he was? Well, James Stalker, who has written a remarkable book called *Imago Christe, the Image of Christ*. He said that when Jesus came into town the first thing he did was to ask where

the nearest mountain was. Just as you and I might ask where the nearest motel is. It was so much a part of his life, the prayer life.

Now that’s not in the Bible but I think I can see our lord looking around as he entered the villages, “Now where will make a nice place for private petition to God.” Third, the purpose of his prayer. Now you’ll notice in my A B C D E F G that I have living proof that it is possible for me to illiterate, for if you look carefully I have preeminence, particulars, purpose and then proclamation, salvation, preservation, dedication, jubilation, unification, gratification. I did that about ten years ago but I kept them because it looked so sweet. [Laughter]

Now let me say just a few words about the purpose of these prayers of our Lord. First of all, our Lord prayed for the proclamation of the word of God. Let’s turn to one passage for this one. The others I think we can slip by without too much reference to the word itself for the sake of time. Mark chapter 1, verse 35 through verse 38. This is a very interesting little section and I want you to notice how Jesus here prays in the light of his preaching. We read verse 35 the Gospel of Mark chapter 1, “ In the early morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house, and went away to a secluded place, and was praying there. Simon and his companions searched for Him; they found Him, and said to Him, ‘Everyone is looking for You.’ He said to them, ‘Let us go somewhere else to the towns nearby, so that I may preach there also; for that is what I came for.’” And he went into their synagogues throughout all Galilee preaching and casting out demons. The implication, it seems to me, is obvious. He prayed. He got up early in the morning before day. He went out and he prayed in the light of the fact that he was going to preach the word.

Luther said, “He who has prayed well has studied well.” But that is true by the way of all teachers of the bible. If you are a teacher in Sunday school, you will not be an effective teacher of the Sunday school class if you do not pray before your class. If you hope that someday to preach the word of God, I hope there are a good number here who

do, that is of you men, [laughter] now you may be if you wish an elder in some denomination and you may be a rabbi in the Jewish faith and be female, but as far as the teaching of the word of God is concerned, I think it’s very plain that those who preach the word should be of the male sex.

Now if you were intend to be a preacher, if you feel that God has given you a spiritual gift of teaching or evangelizing or pastor teacher, then my dear young man you will never be effective in the preaching of the word if you do not pray before you preach. Now I think I can speak from my personal experience that when I have prayed I usually sense that God is with me as I preach.

Now I don’t mean that the audience always thinks that. [Laughter] Sometimes they sense it. Sometimes when I know that I’m speaking in the power of the Spirit, they don’t recognize it all. They’d go out and say, “Well Dr. Johnson was rather dull today or that was a poor message.” Now I’m not talking about you personally, I’m just speaking about my wife. [Laughter] That’s her reaction. She’s not here tonight, that’s the reason why I’m so bold. I’m being very very solemn with you. I do feel that if you are to be effective in the teaching of the word you must pray.

Now, of course, this also holds true for your own individual witness of the word of God, but it particularly applies to the proclamation of the word. And our Lord prayed before he preached. A prepared heart will make a prepared sermon someone has said. Second, he prayed for the salvation of the elect. Now, I changed that. I said that I did this eight or ten years ago but I changed one word. I changed lost to elect. Now I could have left lost there because he prays for the elect when they are lost but in John chapter 17, verse 9, we read, “I ask on their behalf; I do not ask on behalf of the world,”

Now, look at that, “I do not ask on behalf of the world, but of those whom You have given Me; for they are Yours;” Verse 20, “I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word;” Jesus, so far as we know, did not pray for the lost indiscriminately. If he did, they would have been saved. He prayed for

his elect. He did not pray for the world. Some of you are looking at me as if it’s the first time you’ve ever realized that’s what he said. It’s been there in the Bible for nineteen hundred years. And it was he who was responsible for it. I do not pray for the world. I pray for those who are going to believe. Our Lord is concerned about his elect.

Now remember he also said, “Other sheep I have which are not of this fold, them also I must bring, those other sheep.” And those other sheep are those who are the ones who hear his voice. I was reading. I’m past John chapter 10. And I noticed something just a couple of days ago I had not really noticed before. He said in John chapter 10, verse 26 to these unbelieving Jews to whom he was speaking, “But you do not believe,” -- me why? -- Because you are sinners, because you are rebellious. No, that would be true. You do not believe me, “because you are not of my sheep.”

How about that? You do not believe me because you are not of my sheep. He is saying you don’t believe me because you are not of the elect. Don’t like that do you? My sheep hear my voice and I know them and they follow me. And I there am one elect person, here apparently when I looked at her, then she smiled. That’s the way the elect respond to this you know. My sheep hear my voice and I know them and they follow me and I give eternal life to them. And they shall never perish. And no one shall snatch them out of my hand. Great for the salvation of the elect.

Now I spent too much time on that. So I will hastily go through the rest of our list of things that Jesus prayed for. He prayed for the preservation of the saved. Luke chapter 22, verse 22 he prayed for Peter that he ever lives to make intercession for us now. He prayed that we might be saved and he prays that we might be kept. He is our great high priest who has accomplished sacrifice for us. He has prayed that we might come. And now that we have come and have life, he prays that we might have life forever. He is our guarantee of eternal life, past, present and future. He prays for the dedication of the saved. It’s astonishing that Jesus Christ was ever troubled over the

future enough to pray, but he was in the garden of Gethsemane. And he is concerned about our future.

And I think he is so concerned that he prays regarding our own dedication. He says, “Sanctify them by thy word. Thy word is true.” Set them apart by thy word. He prays for the jubilation of the saved. That is that they might be happy and joyful in their faith, John chapter 17, verses 20 and 21. We read, “That they may all be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us,” and I said 17:20 I meant verse 13, “But now I come to You; and these things I speak in the world so that they may have My joy made full in themselves.” He prayed for the unification of the saved, John 17, verses 20 and 21. That they might be one. And he prayed for the gratification of the saved verse 24 of chapter 17, “Father, I desire that they also, whom You have given Me, be with Me where I am, so that they may see My glory which You have given Me,” be with me where I am, isn’t it interesting Jesus asks nothing for himself in a selfish way? He never prayed for forgiveness of sins, for he had no sins for forgiveness, but he never prayed about himself expect that God might be glorified through him. He prayed, I’m sure, for his daily bread. He may have prayed for other things such as wisdom, but primarily all was a prayer directed toward the glorification of God. That was his preeminent concern.

Now, may I conclude? What were the issues of our Lord’s Prayer? Well, of course, they were all answered. That’s obvious. Jesus said you always hear my prayers. But on the human level, our Lord’s prayers were the means whereby he fulfilled his office of prophet, priest and king. It was by reason of his prayer that he was able to walk in the light and thus give men instruction in the light. It was by reason of his prayer that he was able to offer the once and for all sacrifice, for it was by divine ennoblement that he was enabled to offer up his human nature as a sacrifice for our sins. And it was by prayer that he is able to be the king.

Now you may know in German the word for king is *der Konig*. And *Konig* is a word that comes from the German word *kernin*, which means “to be able.” And so the king is one who is able. And our Lord is the king, the one who is able by virtue of the fact that as a man he perfectly prayed to God. And his prayer life points without question to the necessity to a similar life.

Let me remind you of one text then I’ll stop. In Galatians chapter 2, verse 20, Paul says, “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me;” Now we as Christians all know that this is true. That Jesus Christ dwells in us.

Now, I ask you a rhetorical question. My Christian friend, if it is true that Jesus Christ dwells in you and the life you live, you live by reliance upon the Son of God who lives within you. If he lives within you to live your life for you, live his life out in you and if prayer was his very breath, then should we not expect in our lives that prayer should be the very breath of our life? Let’s bow in prayer.

[Prayer] Father we are grateful to Thee for the prayer life of our Lord. And realize within us, in measure, the dependence that our Lord had when he was here upon the earth. Deliver us Lord from the snapshot contact with Thee. Enable us to enjoy the time exposure of time in Thy presence, that Thou mayest be glorified through us for Jesus sake. Amen.