

Lesson 9

JESUS AND PRAYER

To help us really know Jesus, let us look at his prayer life. Jesus did some public prayers but most of Jesus' prayers were private. We are told the occasions but not his words. Later he will tell **us** to go to our room and close the door and pray to our Father in secret.

Nothing is recorded about Jesus praying until his baptism. But we can feel secure that his parents, and those in the synagogues he attended, had taught him how and when to pray.

The first record of Jesus praying was when he was baptized. We looked at it in Lesson 6. "Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heaven was opened,²² and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form, as a dove, and a voice came from heaven, 'Thou art my beloved Son; with thee I am well pleased.'" Luke 3:21-22. God blessed Jesus and identified him.

Jesus had been working in Judea, Samaria and part of Galilee. John the Baptist has been working too, but now he is in prison. Is it time for Jesus to launch out and cover more territory? Mark records, "And in the morning, a **great while** before day, He rose up and went out to a lonely place, and there he prayed." Mark 1:35. We don't know what he said, but the place was *His room with the door closed*. Simon and the others found him and he told them, "Let us go on to the next towns that I may preach there also; for that is why I came out." Mark 1:38. Important decision! Serious prayer! And they went.

The next recorded session of prayer is recorded by Luke. "¹²In these days he went out to the mountain to pray; and all night he continued in prayer to God. ¹³And when it was day, he called his disciples, and chose from them twelve, whom he named apostles; ¹⁴Simon, whom he named Peter, and Andrew his brother, and James and John, and Philip, and Bartholomew, ¹⁵and Matthew, and Thomas, and James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon who was called the Zealot, ¹⁶and Judas the son of James, and Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor." Big decision! Serious prayer! How often have we prayed all night?

I am going to combine the next two together. Mark 6:39-42 tells the story of Jesus feeding the five thousand with five loaves and two fish. Matthew 15:34-37 tells the story of Jesus feeding the four thousand with seven loaves and a few small fish. In both stories Jesus prayed. Families used to pray together at meals. Shouldn't we still?

After Jesus had fed the five thousand Jesus knew they wanted to make him king, by force if necessary. Matthew tells us how he avoided it. "²²Then he made the disciples get into the boat and go before him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds. ²³And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up on the mountain by himself to pray." Matthew 14:22-23. This may have been another long prayer, for in the fourth watch of the night he walked on the water and caught up with the boat. The fourth watch would have been between three and six AM.

The end of Jesus' life on earth is nearing. He wants to be sure that Peter, James and John know who he is and who is in charge and who will be in charge after his death. Luke records, "²⁸ Now about eight days after these sayings he took with him Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain to pray. ²⁹ And as he was praying, the appearance of his countenance was altered, and his raiment became dazzling white. ³⁰ And behold, two men talked with him, Moses and Elijah," Luke 9:28-30. After some discussion, Moses and Elijah disappear and Luke adds, "³⁵ And a voice came out of the cloud, saying, 'This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!'" Luke 9:35. Again, as it was at Jesus' baptism, God in effect says, "Jesus, my son is THE ONE."

Matthew brings us the first of Jesus' prayers where the words are recorded. "²⁵ At that time Jesus declared, 'I thank thee, Father, Lord of heaven and earth that thou hast hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to babes; ²⁶ yea, Father, for such was thy gracious will.'" Matthew 11:26-28. The seventy have come back from a successful mission trip and the common people had responded to them.

It is uncommon for Jesus to say a prayer for others to hear, just to show his power. But in the case of raising Lazares from the dead, he does just that. Lazares had been in the tomb for four days. Jesus is about to be crucified. He wants everyone there to know that he has power over death. John records it this way. "So they took away the stone. And Jesus lifted up his eyes and said, 'Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me. ⁴² I knew that thou hearest me always, but I have said this on account of the people standing by, that they may believe that thou didst send me.' ⁴³ When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, 'Lazarus, come out.' ⁴⁴ The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with bandages, and his face wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, 'Unbind him, and let him go.'" Having demonstrated this event, how can anyone doubt his own resurrection?

When people wanted to bring children to Jesus, the disciples didn't want Jesus to be bothered. Here is the story. "¹³ Then children were brought to him that he might lay his hands on them and pray. The disciples rebuked the people; ¹⁴ but Jesus said, 'Let the children come to me, and do not hinder them; for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven.' ¹⁵ And he laid his hands on them and went away.'" Some congregations seldom, if ever, do this. Maybe they think only Jesus can bless the children. In other congregations, new babies are brought forward and either the minister or one of the elders introduces them and asks Jesus to bless them and for the parents to bring them up to love the Lord. The latter is proper and should be done more often.

When Jesus arranged The Last Supper, Matthew includes the following about the event. "²⁶ Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed, and broke it, and gave it to the disciples and said, 'Take, eat; this is my body.' ²⁷ And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, 'Drink of it, all of you; ²⁸ for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. ²⁹ I tell you I shall not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom.'" Matthew 26:26-29. Most congregations follow his example; asking his blessing on both the bread and the cup every Sunday.

John alone records what I consider Jesus' main prayer. It is so private and so heartfelt that Jesus may have wanted only his closest friend to be with him while he prayed. It is long, all of John 17. Verses 1-5 are a short prayer for himself. "When Jesus had spoken these words, he lifted up his eyes to heaven and said, 'Father, the hour has come; glorify thy Son that the Son may glorify thee, ² since thou hast given him power over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom thou hast given him. ³ **And this is eternal life, that they know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent.** ⁴ I glorified thee on earth, having accomplished the work which thou gavest me to do; ⁵ and now, Father, glorify thou me in thy own presence with the glory which I had with thee before the world was made.'"

Verses 6-19 are a prayer for his disciples. "I have manifested thy name to the men whom thou gavest me out of the world; thine they were, and thou gavest them to me, and they have kept thy word. ⁷ Now they know that everything that thou hast given me is from thee; ⁸ for I have given them the words which thou gavest me, and they have received them and know in truth that I came from thee; and they have believed that thou didst send me. ⁹ I am praying for them; I am not praying for the world but for those whom thou hast given me, for they are thine; ¹⁰ all mine are thine, and thine are mine, and I am glorified in them. ¹¹ And now I am no more in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to thee. Holy Father, keep them in thy name, which thou hast given me that they may be one, even as we are one. ¹² While I was with them, I kept them in thy name, which thou hast given me; I have guarded them, and none of them is lost but the son of perdition, that the scripture might be fulfilled. ¹³ But now I am coming to thee; and these things I speak in the world, that they may have my joy fulfilled in themselves. ¹⁴ I have given them thy word; and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. ¹⁵ I do not pray that thou shouldst take them out of the world, but that thou shouldst keep them from the evil one. ¹⁶ They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. ¹⁷ **Sanctify them in the truth; thy word is truth.** ¹⁸ As thou didst send me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. ¹⁹ And for their sake I consecrate myself, that they also may be consecrated in truth."

Verses 20-26 are his prayer for future believers. "**I do not pray for these only, but also for those who believe in me through their word, ²¹ that they may all be one; even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. ²² The glory which thou hast given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, ²³ I in them and thou in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that thou hast sent me and hast loved them even as thou hast loved me. ²⁴ Father, I desire that they also, whom thou hast given me, may be with me where I am, to behold my glory which thou hast given me in thy love for me before the foundation of the world. ²⁵ O righteous Father, the world has not known thee, but I have known thee; and these know that thou hast sent me. ²⁶ I made known to them thy name, and I will make it known, that the love with which thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them.**"

What a wonderful prayer. If only we could all know it by heart, especially verses 20-26.

The end is near. Jesus is about to be arrested. He knows all the painful things that will be done to him. He dreads the agony. Matthew tells us the story. Matthew 26:36-46.

³⁶ Then Jesus went with them to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to his disciples, “Sit here, while I go yonder and pray.” ³⁷ And taking with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, he began to be sorrowful and troubled. ³⁸ Then he said to them, ‘My soul is very sorrowful, even to death; remain here, and watch with me.’ ³⁹ And going a little farther he fell on his face and prayed, ‘My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt.’ ⁴⁰ And he came to the disciples and found them sleeping; and he said to Peter, ‘So, could you not watch with me one hour?’

Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.”

⁴² Again, for the second time, he went away and prayed, ‘My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, thy will be done.’ ⁴³ And again he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were heavy.

⁴⁴ So, leaving them again, he went away and prayed for the third time, saying the same words. ⁴⁵ Then he came to the disciples and said to them, ‘Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? Behold, the hour is at hand, and the Son of man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. ⁴⁶ Rise, let us be going; see, my betrayer is at hand.’”
Matthew 26:36-46.

Most believe that He dreaded the agony of being the sacrificial lamb for the sins of the world and was asking if there was another way. I don't agree with that. Let us look at one of his earlier prayers. When talking to his apostles about his death and the purpose of it he tells them, ²⁷ “Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? ‘Father save me from this hour?’ No, for this purpose I have come to this hour. ²⁸ Father, glorify thy name.” Then a voice came from heaven, ‘I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.’” John 12:27-28. Jesus knew he was going to the cross, but was all the torture before the cross necessary. His conclusion was, “My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, thy will be done.” John 12:42b.

On the cross, Jesus prayed, “Father forgive them for they know not what they do.”
Luke 23:34.

Jesus' last known prayer was at Emmaus when he gave thanks for the bread he shared with Cleopas.

You may wonder why I did not include *The Lord's Prayer* in this lesson. That prayer was not a prayer that Jesus prayed, it is one he taught others to pray and will be included later.