

CHRIST'S PRAYER EXAMPLE

John 17

Of the many verbs Christ used, pray stands out with unusual significance and real beauty.

I. Christ Taught His Disciples To Pray.

"Pray ye" (Matthew 6:9). "Pray always" (Luke 21:36). "Pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you" (Matthew 5:44). "Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak" (Matthew 26:41).

II. Christ Prayed.

"I go and pray yonder" (Matthew 26:36). "I will pray the Father" (John 14:16). "Neither pray I for these alone" (John 17:20).

Only a casual reading of the gospels will impress one that a large part of Jesus' life must have been given to prayer and meditation. To Him prayer was not merely formality nor perfunctory performance. It was a most vital and real experience.

1. Christ prayed in secret.

"And in the morning, rising up a great while before day, He went out, and departed into a solitary place, and there prayed" (Mark 1:35). "And it came to pass in those days, that He went out into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God" (Luke 6:12).

2. Christ prayed in public.

"At that time Jesus answered and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes" (Matthew 26:26). "And it came to pass that, as he was praying in a certain place, when he ceased, one of his disciples said unto him, Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples" (Luke 11:1). "And he commanded the multitude to sit down on the grass, and took the five loaves, and the two fishes, and looking up to heaven, he blessed, and brake, and gave the loaves to his disciples, and the disciples to the multitude" (Matthew 14:19).

3. Christ prayed for Himself.

"These words spake Jesus, and lifted up his eyes to heaven and said, Father, the hour is come; glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee" (John 17:1). This is the only petition that He has for Himself. The hour was important. "Father, the hour is come," that hour which had been the goal in the heart of God from all eternity. That hour when God's love was to go forth in the bloody sacrifice. Jesus prayed for God's glory--- "that thy Son also may glorify Thee." When you pray, have you

God's glory in mind? When you ask for health, do you have in mind the thought of glorifying God in your body? When you ask for success, do you have God's glory in mind? When you pray for your children, do you have God's glory in mind?

4. Christ prayed for His disciples.

John 17:6-19.

- (1) For the security of the eleven.
"Keep through thine own name."
- (2) For the sanctification of the eleven.
"Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth. As thou hast sent me into the world even so have I also sent them into the world. And for their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth" (John 17:17-19).
- (3) For all who would ever believe in Him.
"Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me" (John 17:20-21).
- (4) For the perfection of all believers.
"I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me" (John 17:23).
- (5) For their final union with Him in heaven.
"Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me" (John 17:24).

5. Christ prayed in Gethsemane.

Jesus said: "My soul is exceeding sorrowful unto death" (Mark 14:34). It seemed as if His agony would crush His life out before He arrived at the cross. "And he went forward a little, and fell on the ground, and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him. And he said, Abba, Father, all things are possible unto thee; take away this cup from me: nevertheless not what I will, but what thou wilt" (Mark 14:34-36). He prayed that if it were possible to save men and carry out the divine plan of redemption in some other way than by His suffering in death, He might be spared.

"Not what I will." This means that He did not merely submit to God's will but desired it and prayed for it. Was that prayer answered? Yes, in a three-fold way: First, God's will was done. Second, strength was given Him to drink the cup, and change it to a cup of blessing. Third, God gave in a better form than the one in which the petition was stated that in His deepest heart he wanted. His prayer was answered for the cross was changed into a crown, Gethsemane into paradise, and death into immortal glory.

6. Christ still prays for us.

Although Jesus is no longer in the flesh on this earth, "He ever liveth to make intercession" for us. Hebrews 7:25. Jesus has appeared in the presence of God for us, as Intercessor, silencing all accusations and freeing from condemnation. "It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us" (Romans 8:34). God has put into the place of the Old Testament office of high priest, His perfect, never-failing Son. In Christ is centered all excellency, sweetness, and desirableness.

No man ever accomplished as much as Jesus did because no man ever devoted as much time to prayer. The more a worker for God prays the sharper will be his tools.

Prayer, to Jesus, meant fellowship with the Father. Prayer was the means of "getting things from God." Prayer was the refuge from life's storms. Prayer planned the Kingdom movements, selected the apostles, established the church. Prayer warded off the fiery darts of the enemy until the fullness of time for their final fury to burst on Him, and then prayer prepared the Lord for the worst.

Jesus began His public ministry with a prayer at the ordinance of His baptism, (Luke 3:12) and closed it with a petition in the midst of the agonies of the cross. And all in between He was constantly borne upward and onward upon the wings of prayer. Prayer consumed much of His time and energy.

Jesus met every onslaught of the enemy with prayer. It sustained Him from the desert wilderness, where the battle raged fierce and furious for forty days, until in hunger and loneliness and weariness of body, it seemed He must yield. It was by prayer that He was supported clear through the final attack in Gethsemane, when bowed and bent and almost broken with the weight of the world's sins, He cried, "Let this cup pass." He ever found one unfailing resource in prayer and through its power met and conquered the arch fiend of all darkness, devilishness and doubt.

There is no greater need among us today than that we shall enter the school of prayer with our Lord. The most casual and superficial observer of our times cannot fail to be impressed with the prevailing prayerlessness of this modern age. Too many of God's people are committing the sin from which Samuel craved deliverance, of failing to pray for one another and for the world. I Samuel 12:23. In the midst of the earth's most tragic and trying times the thing at which God marvels is "that there is no intercessor" (Isaiah 59:16).

Church people work and toil and strain and strive until nerve force is almost exhausted, and in desperation wonder why more is not accomplished. God explains, "Ye lust and have not; ye kill and desire to have, and cannot obtain; ye fight and war, yet ye have not because ye ask not" (James 4:2). Ours is a machine age and we are attempting to make up in the kingdom of God for the lack of spiritual power by mechanical force. It is easier to organize than it is to agonize, and we extoll pep above power. Praying is the very highest energy of which the human soul is capable.

III. The Place of Christ's Prayers.

Jesus had preferred places of prayer. It is said of Him "that He went into a certain mountain to pray"; "He went into the wilderness to pray." It was His habit to go into the garden for the purpose of prayer.

IV. Christ's Posture in Prayer.

"And He was withdrawn from them about a stone's cast, and kneeled down and prayed" (Luke 22:41). "And He went a little farther and fell on His face and prayed" (John 11:41).

This was not only the practice of the past and the method of Jesus but He also taught it. "And when ye stand praying."

Only once did Jesus fall upon His face. It was in Gethsemane when He had gone "a little farther."

V. Christ's Approach in Prayer.

Each prayer of the Lord's always began with the word "Father;" the word "Father" was never absent from the prayers of Jesus. God's child should say "Father."

Jesus not only taught this by His example, but He gave the explicit word to His disciples, and to them only--"When ye pray, say, 'Our Father.'"

This approach makes prayer powerful. It fulfills the sublime condition of all prevailing prayer, that it may be in the name of the Lord Jesus. To pray in the name of the Lord Jesus means more than simply saying, "for Jesus' sake" at the close of the prayer. It means that through His merit, by the right which He has purchased because of His atonement wrought out in my behalf, by virtue of the shed blood and my own cleansed soul, thereby, I can come saying "Our Father."

VI. The Length of Christ's Prayers.

The private prayers of Jesus were very long. His public prayers were very short.

In private He spent hours upon hours in prayer. It is said many times that He spent a whole night in prayer alone. In the desert temptation He no doubt had many such nights with the Father. When the time arrived to choose twelve apostles He must needs spend an entire night in prayer. When the multitude would have forced an earthly crown on His unwilling head He retired into a loneliness with God and prayed. His private praying was marked by the length of the prayers, but His public prayers were very brief.