

The Prayer Life of Jesus

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Jan 2012

TAKING CHRIST'S LOVE TO THE WORLD

THE PRAYER LIFE OF JESUS FROM LUKE'S GOSPEL

This is the first of a series of studies on “The Prayer Life of Jesus from Luke’s gospel” which I have preached and taught in Florida and Minnesota. .

We have chosen Luke because of his particular interest in this crucial aspect of Jesus’ life. Luke refers to several key events in Jesus’ life where he *alone* says that Jesus’ prayer was pivotal to what took place. We see this at: (1) the Baptism of Jesus; (2) at Caesarea Philippi when Peter recognised that Jesus was the Son of God and Messiah; and (3) at the Transfiguration of Jesus. The other synoptic gospels have no references to prayer linked to these three events. There are several other occasions when prayer was equally important that are mentioned by Luke and other gospel writers. We will refer to these as we proceed through Luke’s gospel. The three synoptic gospels all make prayer the focus in Gethsemane

1 PRAYER AND EMPOWERMENT (LK.3:21-22)

The baptism of Jesus marked His entry into public ministry. It is Luke only who fills in some of the background information about the life of Jesus prior to this event. He records the divine conception of Jesus in the womb of Mary (1:35), and the growing up of Jesus from childhood (2:40, 52). However, not one of the gospels has any information to give us about the 18 years of Jesus’ life when he worked for his father and provided for his family. The work of a carpenter was the profession of a poor labouring man, and explains why Joseph could only offer “a pair of turtle doves, or two young pigeons” when he and his wife Mary presented their 12 year old son to the Lord (2:22).

When Jesus walked out of his obscurity and came to see John baptizing in the Jordan River, none was more surprised than he when Jesus came the next day to be baptized by him. There are several important points to be made here, which are taken from John’s gospel:

(1) John said twice: “I did not know Him” (Jn.1:31, 33). John and Jesus were cousins and had no doubt played together as children, but John had never guessed who Jesus was— until now! It came to him by overpowering revelation.

(2) The remarkable prophecy of John that *linked Jesus' baptism with His future sacrifice on the cross*. As Jesus stood before John the revelation came to him and he immediately prophesied saying: "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (Jn.1:29, 36).

(3) The prophecy of John which refers to Jesus is recorded in all the gospels: "He will baptize in the Holy Spirit, and with fire" (Lk.3:16); thus *linking Jesus' baptism with Pentecost*. Before that was possible He had to die as the Lamb for our sins, rise again, ascend to the Father and from the place of exaltation fulfil the prophecy of John Baptist. It is true that Jesus Christ is *the* baptizer in the Holy Spirit. Luke begins his second book (Acts) with the promise of Jesus: "But you shall receive power, when the Holy Spirit has come *upon you*," referring back to John Baptist's prophecy, and applying it to them (Acts 1:8). The promise of Jesus was the foundation for praying in faith, resulting in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Note also that the words of Jesus describing the coming of the Holy Spirit upon them are exactly the same words that were used by Luke to describe the descent of the Spirit upon Jesus.

4) A further revelation given to John was that Jesus was the Son of God: "And I have seen and testified that this is the Son of God" (Jn.1:34). John's gospel is an exposition of this central confession. The third day Jesus returned and John Baptist prophesied again: "Behold the Lamb of God!" Resulting from this prophecy Andrew and John left John Baptist and followed Jesus.

To accomplish the great work of salvation Jesus needed the empowerment of the Holy Spirit, and so we must return to Luke's account for what followed. It is Luke's gospel alone, of the four that *links the opening of heaven and the descent of the Holy Spirit with the praying of Jesus*.

*"Now when all the people were baptized, it came to pass, that Jesus also was baptized, and **while He prayed**, the heaven was opened. And the Holy*

*Spirit descended in bodily form like a dove upon¹ Him.” (3:21-22); the tangible image of the dove was necessary to show the descent of the Holy Spirit because one of the attributes of the Spirit is invisibility. (Refer to **Note (1)** at the end of this essay).*

Note the key words: “while He prayed” that follow on after His baptism. Could we say that His prayer opened heaven? The purpose of the opening of heaven was that the Spirit might now silently descend, proceeding from the Father to the Son (Jn.14:26) and remain on Christ (the “anointed One”) as the anointing from Father for (1) **ministry** in preaching and teaching; (2) for **miracles** and **exorcisms** and (3) for **prayer** and (4) for **strength** to endure the cross.

It was also from the opened heaven that Father now speaks in testimony to His Son: **“You are My Beloved Son; in You I am well pleased.”** (3:22; cf. Isa.42:1-2; Ps.2:7). It is the declaration of His love for His Son and at the same time an affirmation of His Son’s character with regard to Himself. Eternally dwelling, or abiding in His Father, He lived before Him in loving submission and worshipping adoration; thus honouring Him as His head (Cor.11:3). Paul describes God as “the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Eph.1:3, 17; 2Cor.1:3). Jesus and Father have ever lived abiding in perfect love by the enabling and the supply of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit makes possible the fellowship between the three Persons of the Trinity, always hidden and self-emptied in order that **“God may be all in all.”** (1Cor.15:28). In the fourth Servant Song of Isaiah he speaks of Jesus: “He grew up before Him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground” (Isa.53:2). Thus, Isaiah refers to Father’s delight in His Son as He grows and develops through childhood. The tender shoot breaking through the parched and cracked earth refers to His ethnic roots as a Jew and the spiritual condition of the Jewish people (Jn.1:11).

We have on the occasion of Jesus’ baptism the meeting together of **God**- Father, Son, and Holy Spirit and we also have meeting together in the Person of Jesus Christ the union of God and man. As the Son of God (John Baptist’s confession) He was eternally anointed and full of the Holy Spirit. Had He not created the world and man? There was nothing He could not do for His Father. He could have created

1 The Greek also shows that the Spirit “remained” on Him (Jn.1:32).

other worlds and peoples if God had so willed. He did not rest the seventh day because He was exhausted, but rather, because Father's will was to enjoy His creation. *Why* then did Jesus need the Holy Spirit to descend on Him?

We recognise that Jesus Christ was the Son of man. He was human- God sent "His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh." (Rom.8:3). *The coming of the Spirit on Jesus is one of the most powerful proofs of His humanity.* Jesus, like John the Baptist needed to be filled with the Holy Spirit. Such a statement meets with some reserve among Christians because they think it undermines the fact that Jesus is God. There is no question about His Deity- the Father speaks audibly, affirming this truth. The coming of the Holy Spirit not only points to the reality of His humanity, but also provides a model for ministry. If He had healed men by His Divine power, He would not have needed the anointing of the Holy Spirit. Rather, He expressed His total dependence upon His Father for all that He did (Jn.5:9, 30). Submitted to Father, the Holy Spirit was able to work through Him without limit or restraint of power.

The question that is answered by this interpretation of Jesus' baptism viewed as empowerment, points to the fact *that He healed by the anointing of the Spirit, rather than by exercising His divine power as the Son of God (Acts 2:22).* Because He was human He needed to be baptized in the Spirit; but as the Son of God He was sinless and needed no repentance and He did not need John's baptism. As the Son of God he did not need the Spirit to come upon Him- He had the fullness of God always, from eternity to eternity. If He healed men by virtue of His Deity, He is no longer a model of ministry for us, because we are human and not God; although as the sons of God we can similarly be empowered by the Holy Spirit for ministry and for strength to overcome trials of the cross. Jesus went to the cross to obtain salvation for us. An essential part of that salvation is the gift of the Holy Spirit. We need the regenerating Holy Spirit to change and renew our heart and we need the indwelling Spirit to impart to us all the riches and fullness of salvation. The promised gift of the Holy Spirit has been called: "heaven's throne gift." We cannot emphasize sufficiently the importance of this gift of the Holy Spirit as the ultimate objective of Christ's death, resurrection and exaltation.

We have observed in this scene of Jesus' baptism the three Persons of the Godhead present and participating in this climactic action of God. We cannot conceive or experience the Holy Spirit outside of the context of the Godhead. Our theology and experience must engage with Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Hence, we must say that a theology and experience based solely on the book of Acts is inadequate to expound the essence and fullness of the Holy Spirit in the life of the Christian.

Jesus needed the empowerment of the Holy Spirit to engage in prayer ministry. Prayer is impossible without the anointing of the Spirit. This fact becomes very apparent when we see the importance of traveling prayer in Gethsemane.²

The fourth purpose of the empowerment with regard to Jesus is for endurance and strength to go through His baptism of suffering. What people often miss is the enabling and empowering of the Holy Spirit that was crucial to Jesus as He fulfilled John Baptist's prophecy as the Lamb of God, sacrificed for us and taking away the sin of the world. Paul says that: "He was crucified through *weakness*"- pointing to His humanness, as He was weakened through exhaustion and loss of blood as He battled for His life on the cross until redemption was accomplished (2Cor.13:4). This view of Jesus as the Suffering Servant is portrayed by Isaiah as one who is: "Familiar with suffering" (Isa.53:4). He knows this by personal experience having been submitted to suffering, and humbled by it. Suffering includes the sense of *weakness*.³ Paul says: "When I am weak, then am I strong" (2Cor.12:10). In Hebrews we read of the persecuted saints who: "out of weakness were made strong (11:34).

Jesus referred to this baptism of suffering that lay before Him as He progressed on His journey to Jerusalem (Lk.12:50; Mat.20:22). What we have failed to see is the crucial and necessary ministry of the Holy Spirit that enabled Jesus to conquer oncoming death, and to prevail on our behalf. The cross was the means of accomplishing salvation for us and it marked the absolute triumph of Jesus over sin and Satan. Jesus prevailed for us through the anointing of the Holy Spirit! He won and Satan was defeated forever. Hallelujah!

2 See NOTE 2 at the end of the essay.

3 (Motyer, 1993, p. 148) The Prophecy of Isaiah

“So He Himself often *withdrew* himself into the wilderness, and ***prayed.***”
(Lk.5:16).

Take time to read around this verse and you will see that Jesus had been healing multitudes of people and His fame was growing. Perhaps Jesus thought that things were getting out of hand - often He withdrew Himself from the crowds, and He constantly told those He had healed to avoid making it known. John said that He did not commit Himself to the crowds because He “knew what was in man” (Jn.2:24-25). He exposed their wrong motives - “You seek Me, not because you saw the miracles, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled” (6:26). He often corrected those who expressed wrong views about Himself and of course the worst danger came from those who wanted to make Him a king, and thus deliver them from the oppression of Rome.

Human adulation is a snare and a trap that has brought down men of God and ruined their ministry. Jesus constantly testified that everything He did was the work of His Father: “The Son can do *nothing* of Himself” (5:19), and again: “I can of myself do *nothing*” (5:30). Peter, likewise turned attention from himself by attributing the healing of the lame man to the power of Jesus’ name (Acts 3:12, 16). The words of Paul show realism and humility in the face of a church that put great store on men’s ministries: “learn in us not to think of men beyond what is written that none of you may be puffed up on behalf of one against another.” (1Cor.4:6; 1:12; 3:3-5). The disciples throughout their time with Jesus were dogged by pride and self- seeking for position.

It was out of deep concern, disquiet and urgency that Jesus went into the wilderness alone to pray. The wilderness is a desolate and austere place, and it reminded Jesus of His confrontation with Satan. Prayer sometimes is our only recourse of action. Prayer is not an option it is a necessity. It is prayer alone that releases the power of God that directly influences the hearts of men and turns things around for us. Following this season of prayer we read of: (1) the presence of religious leaders from all the towns around Galilee (intimidation and mounting

opposition?). Prayer does not necessarily remove the things that are severe temptations to us; and (2) “And the power of the Lord was *present to heal them*” (5:17). Certainly, there had been fullness of power already manifest in the ministry of Jesus; was this a new release of power resulting from Jesus’ intercession?

Here is a very practical lesson for us - if Jesus needed to engage in withdrawal prayers, it is imperative that when we feel the urgent need to pray that we *obey* the promptings of the Holy Spirit. It is also necessary to engage in withdrawal prayers when we sense the carnality of our own heart or when we feel we are not close to the Lord. The young man, Jeremiah Lanphier who began the “Noon Day Prayer Meeting” in New York that sparked the 1859 revival that swept America and Britain, posted a notice on the door of the church where he was newly appointed as a Christian Worker:

“How often shall I pray?”

“As often as the language of prayer is in my heart; as often as I see my need of help; as often as I feel the power of temptation; as often as I am made sensible of any spiritual declension, or feel the aggression of a worldly earthly spirit.”

“In prayer we leave the business of time for that of eternity, and intercourse with men for intercourse with God.”

3 A NIGHT OF PRAYER (LK.6:12-13)

*“Now it came to pass in those days, that He went out to the mountain to **pray**, and continued all night in prayer to God. And when it was day He called his disciples to Himself; and of them he chose twelve whom He also named apostles.” (Lk.6:12-13).*

Luke is not alone in making the direct link between prayer and Jesus’ choosing his 12 disciples (Mat.19:1-4; Mk.3:13-19).

My first question is this: why did Jesus go up a mountain to pray? The answer is very simple- He needed to be apart from people. You also need times when you can get away from people to pray, to be alone with God. Being alone with Him focuses

your heart on Him. I do it daily, by going early into the church to pray. I am free to express myself without inhibition before God. As a person I need to do this and I find great benefit from waiting on God alone.

All night prayer or all day prayer (24/7) may be extended to days or weeks. In Luke we encounter the *personal* prayers of Jesus; in Acts, Luke's second volume that continues the story of Jesus through the early church we encounter the *corporate* prayers of the church.

There can be no doubt about the link between Jesus' night praying and His action on the following day when He gathered His disciples together and chose 12 of them: "that they might *be with* Him, and that He might *send* them forth to preach." (Mk.3:14). We have a clear insight how Jesus prayed for them from His pastoral prayer in John Ch.17 (vv6-12). No doubt His praying brought clarification and a clear sense of God's will about each disciple. Prayer is often like stepping stones which have been placed on the bed of a river. You put your foot firmly on the first one before you can proceed to the next. In prayer we see clearly the first step of obedience and by taking that step we can then seek God for clarity about further steps. I say this because in hindsight we know that Jesus chose Judas as one of the privileged "twelve." Did Jesus not know about the future? Surely, Jesus discerned the heart of this man? Whatever Jesus could see, or could not see, we believe that He was clear about the selection of these 12 men. Could Judas have turned out differently? He had the same opportunities as the other disciples to experience the challenge of following Jesus and the same opportunities to make the necessary responses of repentance and faith.

Jesus invited sinners to follow Him, knowing that being with Him they could be changed into new men. Peter believed that Judas had been marked out for the apostolic ministry, but through his sin he had forfeited that portion appointed him by Jesus (Acts 1:17). There were others- close associates of Paul, who had been engaged in ministry with him who likewise forfeited their portion appointed them by God. I hear the apostle Paul, in the light of these defections of Christian men; praying earnestly: "lest when I have preached the gospel to others, I *myself* should be disqualified (rejected!) (1Cor.9:27). If we know our own hearts vulnerability to

sin and temptation we will keep a close watch on our heart and life. Prayer allows the Holy Spirit to search, convict and reprove us of our sin and carnality. We need to experience a life of daily accountability to God and daily repentance for not living closer to Him. In key leadership positions do we seek the adulation of men, and are we guilty of imposing our own will upon others?

More love, more power, *and* more brokenness before the face of God. The reality of a pure heart guards my heart from sin, but does not guarantee my future unless I stay close to God and live under His scrutiny (2Cor.7:9-11).

Jesus chose these 12 men so He could make them disciples and Christian Workers: “Then He appointed twelve, that they might *be with Him* and that He might send them out to preach.” (Mk.3:14).

The most important thing about prayer is that it brings you into the presence of Jesus. Addressing the wider group of new disciples (Mat.Ch.5-7) He taught simple elementary lessons about discipleship and prayer. He said: “But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly.” (Mat.6:6). Imagine God’s hopes and desires as you close the door and turn your face towards Him. The presence of God is transforming. Paul describes it as ascending degrees of glory (2Cor.3:18). Moses was so transformed by dwelling in God’s presence for two periods of 40 days fasting and prayer that he had to put a veil over his face when he talked to men (Ex.34:29-35).

John G. Paton, the famous missionary to the New Hebrides, recalled his father’s times of private prayer. “We always knew whence came the light, as of a new-born smile that always was dawning upon my father’s face. It was the reflection of the divine Presence, in the consciousness of which he lived. Though everything else in religion were by some unthinkable catastrophe to be swept out of memory, or blotted from my understanding, my soul would wander back to those early scenes, and shut itself up once again in that sanctuary closet and hearing the echoes of those cries to God, would hurl back all doubt with victorious appeal, “He walked with God, why may not I?”

“This is the noblest science to know how to live in hourly communion with God in Christ” Robert Murray McCheyne.

“It is impossible for a saint, no matter what his experience, to keep right with God if he will not spend time with God. In order to keep the heart and mind awake to God’s high ideals, you have to keep coming back again and again to the primal source. If you do not you will be crushed into degeneracy with God; let other things go but don’t neglect Him. Just as a poet or an artist must keep his soul brooding on the right lines, so a Christian must keep the sense of God’s call always awake. Spend plenty of time with God; let other things go but don’t neglect Him.” Oswald Chambers.

In Mark we read about Jesus praying. “Now in the morning, having risen a long while before daylight, He went out and departed to a solitary place; and there He prayed” (Mk.1:35). A parallel verse in Luke is 5:16 where Jesus withdrew into the wilderness and prayed. I call this withdrawal prayer, when the person needs to be alone with God, apart from others.

“Prayer is always an accurate thermometer of our spiritual health. Let your heart grow cold and you soon excuse yourself from the prayer room. If nothing really takes place in that private room with Father you will soon absent yourself from that holy place. Dry hearts find prayer boring. Rekindle the flame of your passion for Jesus- however long it takes. Stay there in the presence of God. Promise Him that you will not let Him go until He blesses you! Spend time daily alone with God until he opens heaven to you and pours out His Holy Spirit upon you.

4 CAESAREA PHILIPPI: PRAYER AND REVELATION (LK.9:18-22)

The event that took place here marks a water-shed in the ministry of Jesus. We can speak of “before” and “after.”

So much changed following Peter’s confession concerning the Person of Christ.

Firstly, we note the direct link that Luke makes between prayer and Jesus’

question: “And it happened, as He was alone *praying*, that His disciples joined Him, and He asked them, saying, “Who do the crowds say that I am?” (Lk.9:18).

We have already noticed how Jesus withdrew from the crowds, resulting from His concern about what men were saying about Him. He cared little for their opinions, but it was very important how His disciples viewed Him. His concern is expressed in this question He asked them. He turned to them and asked about their view of Him. Like an arrow from a bow Peter stated the truth about Jesus: “***You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.***” (Mat.16:16).

Jesus immediately confirmed to Peter that this revelation had come to him *directly* from the Father. I believe that it had come to him as a result of Jesus’ praying. He had been specifically praying to this end. It was pivotal to Jesus that His disciples understood who He truly was, as a necessary preparation for His mission of salvation. How could He proceed towards the cross, until His identity was rooted in their hearts? We know that this was the case *because immediately following this event He begins for the first time to teach them about the cross* where He is going to die: “The Son of man *must* suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised the third day.” (Lk.9:22).

It was from this point onwards that Jesus began to teach about His suffering, death, and resurrection. This is why we speak of a watershed in His life and ministry

The confession of Peter:

a) “You are the Christ”

Although it was Peter who received the revelation it was John who wrote his gospel with the clear purpose of revealing Jesus as the Messiah *and* the Son of God to his readers: “But these (signs) are written that you may believe that ***Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God***, and that believing you may have life in His Name.” (Jn.20:31). John only records John Baptist’s confession: “This is the Son of God.” (Jn.1:34). As soon His first disciples met Him they recognised Him as Messiah (Jn.1:41, 45). Early in His ministry Jesus said to the woman of Samaria that He was the Messiah (Jn.4:26).

Why had it taken these men so long to discover that Jesus was *truly* the Anointed One, the Messiah? Of course the equally important question that follows is this: What kind of Messiah are we talking about? This is where Peter came unstuck, and henceforth became the target of so many preachers' criticisms. Jesus had firmly rejected the notion of a political Messiah, and continued to do so, right up to His crucifixion. But a crucified Messiah was far removed from Peter's understanding of his revelation! He opposed the teaching of Jesus that He *must* die; resulting in the most severe rebuke possible: "But when he had turned around and looked at His disciples, he rebuked Peter, saying, "Get behind me, **Satan**: for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men." (Mk.8:33). With regard to his sufferings Jesus spoke of himself as the "Son of man" (Lk.9:22).

Simeon had recognized the Messiah in the baby Jesus, who he held in his arms (Lk.2:26). Anna the aged widow who lived to pray and fast in her service to God in the temple recognised Him also (2:38). But they were devoted prayers and thus open to prophetic revelation. I entitled this section: "Prayer and Revelation." To appreciate the momentous import of Peter's revelation you would need to go back into the Messianic prophecies that run throughout the Old Testament:⁴

b) "You are the Son of the living God."

This was the revelation that John Baptist received in the Jordan River (Jn.1:34) and takes us to John's gospel and his central paradigm: "But these are written that you may believe that **Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God**, and that believing you may have life in His name." (Jn.20:31). This is shown to us by the words of Jesus as he constantly refers to His relationship to His Father; including the final statement that precipitated His arrest: "I and my Father are one" (Jn.10:30). Jesus was crucified

4 Gen.3:15; 49:9-10; Deut.18:15-19; the Messianic Psalms and particularly the Messianic prophesy of Isaiah. He prophesied of the Davidic Messiah (1-37); the birth of the Messiah (7:1; 9:6), but also the Servant (40-55); His sufferings (Ch.53), and worldwide salvation (55:1-5) alongside a world-wide house of prayer for "all nations" (56:1-8).

because of this statement and similar affirmations of His Deity. Read again the declarations of the Father about Jesus in Hebrews Ch.1. Of course the strongest affirmation of Jesus came from His Father (Mat.3:17). Following His baptism Jesus enters immediately into His temptations. Only 3 verses later Satan has the audacity to question the Father's affirmation: "Now when the tempter came to Him, he said, ***"If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread."*** (Mat.4:3).

From the beginning the religious leaders recognized that Jesus' authoritative pronouncement of forgiveness was the prerogative of Deity alone.

*"And, behold, they brought to him a man sick of the palsy, lying on a bed: and Jesus seeing their faith said to the sick of the palsy; Son, be of good cheer; **your sins are forgiven you.** And, behold, some of the scribes said within themselves, "This man blasphemeth!" (Mat.9:2-3).*

"But that you may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins"- then he said to the paralytic, "Arise, take up your bed, and go unto your house." (v6)

Several actions of Jesus must be understood in the light of His Deity (by Deity we mean that Jesus is God). One night He prayed during a storm that jeopardized the lives of the apostles. He calmly walked on the water, rescued Peter from the waves, stepped into the boat and instantly there was total calm. The awed disciples recognised Him as the Son of God due to His awesome power as creator God (as Creator nature is subject to His will). *"Then they that were in the ship came and worshipped him, saying, **Truly You are the Son of God.**" (Mat.14:33).* Here we see the Son of God manifesting Himself through His humanity.

The "I AM" statements of Jesus in the gospel of John are affirmations of Sonship, sometimes affirmed by "signs" which were miracles that gave support to such claims. These miracles that took place by the powerful anointing of the Holy Spirit were clear testimonies to His Divine Sonship.

The Transfiguration is linked directly to the event of Caesarea Philippi by the word “after.” This link is not only due to their historical sequence, but also their theological sequence. Transfiguration follows resurrection, just as resurrection follows death. Jesus had taken up the cross, and thus He began to teach His disciples about His death and resurrection. He repeated His former statement about suffering after His transfiguration experience (v44). Scripture says the disciples did not understand these sayings (v45). Jesus had applied cross bearing for them also; they were to take up their cross daily and follow Him! (9:23-24).

Luke says the transfiguration took place about 8 days later, but Matthew and Mark are specific and say that it was six days later. Those six days after Jesus’ announcement of suffering and death were probably marked by sorrow, misunderstanding, insecurity and questions about the future of Jesus and their relationship with Him. His severe rebuke to Peter: *“Get behind me, Satan! For you savour for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men.”* (Mk.8:33) was probably very difficult for him to accept and He no doubt shared his distress with the others.

But what did these days mean to Jesus? Certainly, isolation as He recognised that He was alone as He faced the inevitable suffering and death of the cross. He had not been understood. But Jesus had been chosen by God for this, and in the Jordan He had been anointed for this specific purpose – but these things did not lessen the pain, or excuse Him from paying the full price of our redemption. This is where we so often misunderstand God. His favour and love; His Divine choice and His anointing *do not protect us* from the vulnerabilities of our humanity, or from the costliness of obedience to Him. We read in Hebrews that our High–Priest Intercessor is: *“touched by the feeling of our infirmities.”* (Heb.4:15). Paul speaks of *“the things which concern his infirmities”* (2Cor.11:30), followed by his translation to glory in the heavenlies. This is followed by his repeated reference to his own infirmities: *“Most gladly therefore will I glory in my infirmities that the power of Christ may rest upon me.”* (2Cor.12:9). The Charismatics and so called apostles of his own day opposed him, no less than those in our own day who have no place for

suffering and infirmity in the context of their triumphalism. Paul says that we must *“through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God”* (Acts 14:22).

Again, it is Luke who links Jesus’ transfiguration to prayer: *“And as He prayed, the appearance of His face was altered, and His robe became white and glistening.”* (Lk.9:29). Jesus was transfigured – *“before them.”* (Mat.17:2). The disciples who witnessed this were Peter, John and James, and it was for their sakes that He manifested Himself in such splendour and glory. The three accounts describe the metamorphosis that takes place:

“... and His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became as white as the light.” (Mat.17:2)

“And His clothes became shining, exceeding white, like snow; such as no launderer on earth can whiten them.” (Mk.9:3)

“... the appearance of His face was altered, and His robe became white and glistening.” (Lk.9:29).

The change that came over Him is described by the Greek word *μεταμορφώω* which means to change into another form. Luke uses a different phrase *egeneto heteron*, “was altered,” or, “became different.”⁵

We are familiar with the process in nature whereby a caterpillar forms a chrysalis around itself and sometime later splits it open and a beautiful butterfly emerges. In this analogy from nature we say the caterpillar has to “die” so that a new butterfly can emerge. Apply this to Jesus who undergoes a metamorphosis, emerging out of death with a glorified body, resplendent in glistening, shining light. This glorified body of Jesus is the outcome of a physical death and resurrection followed by His exaltation to the right hand of God. Paul met and Stephen saw the glorified Christ. The disciples of Jesus saw the risen Christ who was not yet glorified.

5 W.E.Vine “Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words” p148
WIKIPEDIA on the internet under “metamorphosis”.

There is a direct link here with Caesarea Philippi - where Jesus declared His sufferings to His disciples, and the glory that would follow His resurrection and ascension. The disciples had seriously doubted Jesus and also themselves following Jesus' statement about the cross and His rebuke of Peter, but here they are exposed to a glory that transcends death and shows them the inner essence or being of God Himself, emerging and shining out from His face, the body of Jesus and the very clothes that He was wearing. Doubts and questions evaporate in the presence of God. The three men are silenced and overcome with awesome fear and wonder.

In the Old Testament the priests had to withdraw from the Tabernacle when God filled the place with His glory (Ex.40:34-35; 2Chron.5:14). Nobody talks about the transfiguration. Why transfiguration at this point? Surely, such an experience (unique) would have made the cross even more difficult to anticipate. What a contrast! This experience served only to strengthen the resolve of Jesus to go to the cross. For Him the time had now come: "He steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem." (Lk.9:51 see also v53). The writer to the Hebrews says: "(Jesus) for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God." (Heb.12:2). The transfiguration of Jesus anticipated His exaltation to the right hand of Father, and His High-Priestly Prayer: "And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was" (Jn.17:5). His human Person had known no previous glory before the transfiguration on the mount.

The transfiguration is followed by the appearance of **Moses** and **Elijah** who "*appeared in glory*" and were talking with Jesus about His "*exodus*" which He would accomplish at Jerusalem. The link between Moses and the Exodus takes us back to God's deliverance of Israel through the Red Sea (Ex.Ch.14). The EXODUS was the great epochal event of deliverance in the life of the nation, when the LORD demonstrated His great salvation in the context of historical events. The wind of God parted the waters of the Red Sea to make way for the passage of the Israelites and to ensure their deliverance from Pharaoh and also the destruction of the entire army of Pharaoh. The Song of Moses that followed is a triumph song to the LORD who has gloriously triumphed:

*“The LORD is my strength and song,
And He has become my **salvation**;
He is my God, and I will praise Him;
My father’s God, and I will exalt Him.” (Ex.15:2).*

The deliverance *followed* a memorable night that was remembered year by year in the Passover Feast. Before the night events began each home had to be protected by the blood- the door posts and lintel had to be sprinkled with blood to protect them from God’s judgment. The angel of death could not enter the homes *protected* by the blood. A **lamb** had to be killed in the view of the entire community, and its blood shed to provide a covering or protection from the angel of death. Inside the family home they took the lamb whose blood was protecting their home. They roasted the flesh of the lamb on the fire and ate it with their coats and their shoes on- ready for a hasty retreat from Egypt. Thus, the Lamb provided protection and provision for them.

These historical events were rich in typological significance providing insights into the truths surrounding the death of Jesus and the salvation accomplished through the cross. It requires no stretch of the imagination to consider that these events and truths were the subject of Christ’s conversation with Moses and Elijah as they met with Him and talked with Him “in glory” (Lk.9:31). The EXODUS was the dramatic *beginning* of Israel’s history and was viewed as the great defining act of God’s salvation. The Exodus was at the same time a death (decease) and a deliverance. Israel was baptized into death in the Red Sea (1Cor.10:1-2), and delivered out of death by the Red Sea. Jesus prayed that He might be “delivered out of (*ek*) death” (Heb.5:7). God answered His prayer- but to be delivered out of death, He had to go into death. These two verses in Hebrews (vv7-8) describe the intercessory prayer of Jesus in Gethsemane, and demonstrates how Jesus prevailed in prayer with God, and how God answered Him.

From the Red Sea Moses brought Israel to Sinai. Here Moses received the Law, following 40 days on the mount with God. A second period of 40 days followed concluded by intense intercessory prayer for the nation. Moses’ prayer averted the rejection of Israel by God. He came out of that experience of prevailing prayer to cry passionately to God: “SHOW ME YOUR GLORY!” God answered his prayer in a wonderful way (Ch.34:4-5). The presence of Moses on the mount witnessing the

glorious transfiguration of Jesus may be seen as an answer to his request made so many years before. He was now beholding the glory of God.

Because the first generation of Israelites rebelled against the LORD they spent 40 years wandering in the wilderness, thus separating the Exodus from the entry into Canaan by a generation. We must see the Exodus and the entry into Canaan as two parts of one whole. Israel travelled from Egypt to Mount Sinai in 3 months (Ex.19:1). Here, Moses spent 40+40 days in the mountain with God. Between those two periods of intercession and worship he had to return down the mountain and deal with the incident of the golden calf and then the tabernacle had to be built according to the pattern “which was *shown* to you in the mount” (Ex.25:40). I believe that Moses saw the pattern of the entire tabernacle in all its details and parts pictorially by vision) as he lay prostrate before God in worship. This vision had to be translated into a real tabernacle, which was not completed until we come to the last verses of Exodus (Ex.40:33). Jehovah took up His residence in the Most Holy Place of the Tabernacle- evidenced by the “glory of the Lord” filling it. The book of Leviticus opens with God speaking from inside the Tabernacle (Lev.1:1; Nu.1:1). In Numbers (1:1) we have a further time indicator. It is now the second year after they had left Egypt. Moses described the departure of Israel from Sinai (Nu.10:33; Dt.1:6-8). The passage in Deuteronomy makes it clear that Moses’ intention was to lead them *immediately* into the Promised Land.

We can see also that Jesus taught His disciples about His exodus that would be accomplished through suffering, death *and* resurrection- this is the message of Caesarea Philippi. However, this is not the complete picture of the great salvation accomplished by Jesus; this *must* include the ascension and exaltation of Jesus. This is why the two events of Caesarea Philippi and Transfiguration are linked together in the gospels. Hence, the words: “after these things” (Lk.9:28). The Transfiguration completes the picture for us. Salvation lifts us from the gutter and makes us fit to live on the earth, but has in it the hope of eternal life. The resurrection of the body is a Biblical doctrine that is sadly neglected like the doctrine of the ascension of Jesus.

God's plan was to bring Israel into the Promised Land. I believe this is where we can introduce a fresh line of discussion among Jesus and His two guests from glory. Both Moses and Elijah experienced a unique and personal "exodus" from this life to life beyond the grave. We are going to consider their personal exodus.

Firstly, we will focus our attention on **Moses**. We skip over his long life of leading God's people and eventually reach the end of the book of Deuteronomy. Moses had led Israel to the border of the Promised Land and prepared them for entry (Deuteronomy) but he had been forbidden to take them in. Instead, the Lord commanded him to ascend the mountain where he would die before the Lord; having viewed the Promised Land before His death. We can translate this picture quite easily into the present context; Jesus has viewed the Promised Land from the Mount of Transfiguration. He has seen the glory of the land, but has not been permitted to enter, not because of disobedience, but because He has *chosen* the path that leads to death on the cross. He will die in the presence of the Lord like Moses.

We look now at **Elijah's** departure from this life for the life beyond the grave. He was also in conversation with Jesus about His "exodus" at Jerusalem. Elijah had transcended death, like Enoch he was translated into the presence of God without dying. Elijah had a whirlwind entrance into heaven. No man entered heaven with such drama and glory! The Scriptures describe the end of both these men of God. Moses viewed the Promised Land from afar, but he departed to a much better Land than earthly Canaan, despite its description as a "land flowing with milk and honey!" He had been prevented from leading Israel there because he rebelled against the Lord, and in anger hit the rock to bring forth water to satisfy their thirst.

The rock represented Christ in His work of salvation on the cross. Moses had like Peter sinned against the suffering Messiah. Peter faced the rebuke of Jesus – "Get behind Me, Satan! You are an offence to Me: for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men." (Mat.16:23). Moses also faced the rebuke of the LORD who did not allow him to lead God's people into the Promised Land because of his rebellion (Nu.20:7-13; Deut.3:26-27; 32:51).

Jesus did not rebel but chose to submit Himself to Father. Isaiah wrote of the suffering Messiah:

*“He was oppressed and He was afflicted,
Yet He opened not His mouth;
He was led as a **lamb** to the slaughter,
And as a sheep before its shearers is silent,
So He opened not His mouth (Isa.53:7)*

Paul says: “And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.” (Phil.2:8).

For Jesus the statement of William Penn applied: “No Cross, No Crown”. The whirlwind ascension lay in the future for Him, and the cross was a non-negotiable necessity: “*The Son of Man **must** (dei)⁶ suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised the third day.*” (Lk.9:22 see also Mk.10:45). We believe that as Jesus conversed with Moses and Elijah the Scriptures were opened to them in a similar way to Jesus’ experience with the two who travelled with Him to Emmaus (Lk.24:36). Thus, He was strengthened by fellowship and the prophetic insights of the Word of God.

6 PRAYER FOR “LABOURERS IN HIS HARVEST” (LK.9:2 CF. MAT.9:37-38).

Matthew puts this prayer of Jesus for labourers *immediately* before He commissions and sends out His 12 disciples on village evangelism. Matthew gives the fullest account of Jesus’ instructions to his disciples. The action that followed Jesus’ specific prayer was a direct outcome of His prayer. Similarly in Acts Ch.13 the commissioning and sending of Antioch’s first missionaries was the result of prayer. Prior to Jesus’ prayer He had trained and mentored these men and shown them in His life and ministry the miraculous power of the Holy Spirit. In sending them forth He commissioned them to cast out unclean spirits and to heal all kinds of sicknesses and diseases (Mat.10:1, 8). He also clearly told them how to engage with people

6 “Expository Dictionary” W. E. Vine p93. “necessity arising from the determinate will and counsel of God.”

and how they were to conduct themselves in mission. In Acts Ch.13 the commissioning of Barnabas and Saul followed on from their period of training at Antioch and Jerusalem, and was preceded by the specific instruction of the Holy Spirit, “The Holy Spirit said, “Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them” (Acts 13:2). They were a further generation of disciples who were the result of Jesus’ prayer for labourers into His harvest. Jesus is called “the Lord of the harvest” (Lk.10:2).

7 JESUS TEACHING ON PRAYER (LK.11:1-13; 18:1-14).

This series of Bible studies from Luke’s gospel examines those occasions when Jesus engaged in specific prayer. Jesus’ teaching on prayer no doubt comes out of His experience in prayer and is adapted for His disciples to teach them how to pray but is not part of our study.

8 JESUS’ PASTORAL PRAYER FOR PETER (LK.22.31).

Peter was gripped by fear from the occasion of the Last Supper; to be told that one of their trusted company would betray Jesus and then told by Jesus that he also would deny him sparked in him a deep sense of insecurity and no doubt he was offended by Jesus’ words. His hasty action in the Garden with a sword demonstrated the turmoil of his heart and then to deny His Lord before a serving maid. To be held by the eyes of Jesus at the moment of his final denial was surely too much for him. He hastily left the scene of his shameful disloyalty to find a private place to weep out his heart and to reproach himself for his weakness and fear.

Simon Peter eventually made his way to the cross to behold his Saviour die. I believe for him the cross had a profoundly deep and lasting effect. He said to the elders in the churches, to whom he was writing,

“I also am an elder and a witness to the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed” (1Pet.5:1).

Following the resurrection of Jesus, John concludes his gospel with an account of Jesus meeting the disciples by the lakeside. Jesus has provided a tasty breakfast for

them. He singles out Peter and asks him three times if he loves Him. Despite Peter's failure under temptation Jesus commissions him to feed His sheep (1Pet.5:2) and lambs (1Pet.2:2). Paul also records a private visit to Peter by the risen Lord (1Cor.15:5).

Jesus' prayers were crucial in his dark hours of failure and saved him from defecting due to his rash nature. How many of us through burning tears have cried to God in our failures for forgiveness and help. Jesus has never failed us and His prayers have sustained us in the hour of our failure and lifted us up to greater heights of service.

9 JESUS' PRAYING IN GETHSEMANE (LK.22:39-46)

My intention is to look at Gethsemane from the viewpoint of prayer. Luke's emphasis on prayer is no less apparent here than in the previous key events we have considered. It is an emphasis shared with the other synoptic gospels; in fact we will draw on these gospels to complete our understanding of Jesus' prayers in the Garden. This section begins with an exhortation to His disciples to pray (v40) and concludes with a similar exhortation (v46). Jesus' struggle in prayer is presented by Luke as the watershed in His account of the Passion narrative. Strenuous prayer enables Jesus to be faithful to His Father by embracing His will.

Gethsemane is holy ground; it represents the "Holy of Holies," it is the place where we tremble to enter. By using typology to make a link between the Tabernacle and the cross we can proceed further and consider the Day of Atonement- the one day in the Jewish religious calendar when the High-Priest went into "The Holy of Holies" to make atonement for the sin of Israel (Lev.Ch.16). Rather than base our observations on the O.T. picture, we will begin with the reality of Jesus' prayer in the Garden and refer back to the O.T. later. Thus, we will not be distracted from our first priority which is to focus our whole attention on Jesus as He prays to His Father before His arrest and crucifixion. Each of the 3 Synoptic gospels gives a primary place to Gethsemane, but John does not, despite the fact that he was there with his brother James and Peter He gave his unique account of events in the Upper Room prior to Gethsemane (Jn.Ch.13) and then later the "High-Priestly Prayer" of Jesus (Ch.17).

At this point it is necessary to read carefully each account so that we can piece together a more complete picture.⁷ I am going to refer to several points that are important for our overall picture of Gethsemane. You will find that they are found in different gospels; standing out uniquely from each other.

1) Matthew's account (Mat.26:36-46)

“And He took with Him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and He began to be sorrowful and deeply distressed. Then He said to them, “My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death. Stay here and watch with Me.” He went a little farther and fell on His face, and prayed, saying, “O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You *will*.” (26:37-39).

No sooner had He taken the three chosen disciples with Him, when “He began to be *sorrowful* and *very heavy*” (Mt.26:37- AV). He described this to them: “My soul is *exceedingly sorrowful* to death” (v38). Twice Jesus refers to sorrow; the second time to overwhelming sorrow. The sorrows of mankind fell heavily and *suddenly* upon Him in the Garden- He *fell* to the ground. In one sentence Matthew says how Jesus took the three chosen disciples and without a break he says that the burden came on Jesus. Don't pass by the extent of this overwhelming sorrow because it brought Him to the edge of death. So quickly He is faced with death! Jesus had no way of knowing the extent of the sufferings that awaited Him, nor did He know how it would affect Him. He had never had to handle pain like this before. The sufferings of Jesus in the Garden are in the realm of His soul- they are not physical as his sufferings on the cross. Christ is bowed down with sorrow so intense that He says that it brings Him to the edge of death. He prays with agonized intercessions. None but Christ could bear in His own Self the burden of sin and the judgment of God on sin. Sorrow follows on the heels of sin. Sorrow is the direct result of sin.

7 (**Note:** It is helpful to have your own “Comparison of the Gospels,” which shows you in parallel columns where the different accounts vary from each other, and where they are exactly the same. It would also be useful to read how this may be explained in terms of the various documents behind the gospels. You will need to consult a good Bible Dictionary).

The Suffering Servant (Jesus Christ) of Isaiah is given the title: *“The man of Sorrows”* (53:3). This is because He has identified Himself with our sin (vv4-5), and born the pain and anguish of our sorrows. He is conversant with every aspect and dimension of suffering that mankind has suffered from the beginning of time as a direct consequence of sin. His empathy with man is the result of His own humanity. The writer to the Hebrews makes the point that it is because of His humanity that He can truly intercede for us (Heb.2:14, 17; 4:15). Jesus declared His mission in the synagogue at Nazareth in the words of Isaiah: *“He (Father) has sent Me to heal the broken hearted”* (Lk.4:16; Isa.61:1, 2). A line from an old hymn says: *“He took my sins and my sorrows and made them His very own.*

The physical crucifixion is the outworking of what He embraced and resolved to do in Gethsemane. In the Garden He faces the ultimate issues for which He is about to die. His agonies of travailing prayer resulted in the Father hearing and answering His prayers. Much is made of the words: *“O My Father, if it is possible let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will”* (v39), suggesting that this verse shows a conflict between the will of Jesus and the will of His Father. This repeated prayer of Jesus is central to Gethsemane. What the verse shows is the final agreement of Jesus to take *“the cup”* from the hand of Father and submit to **the judgment and wrath of God** against sin.

Jesus prayed three times making His request to Father to remove the cup from Him (like Paul who prayed three times to have the thorn removed - 2Cor.12:8). The issue here was the revulsion of Jesus to drinking the cup. The cup represents two things: (1) the poison of sin, and (2) the wrath of God against sin. I believe both may be seen as the bitter cup from which He shrunk. Adam Clarke, Wesley’s theologian and commentator on Scripture points to the death of Socrates at Athens, who was forced to drink a cup of the juice of hemlock. Before he could drink the dregs of the death cup he lay crumpled up, dead on the floor.

The prophet Ezekiel was on one occasion commanded by God to prepare barley cakes to eat as part of a prophetic act to show Israel that in the land of exile they will eat defiled bread. The LORD gave to him the exact ingredients which included *“dung that comes out of man”* (Ezek.4:12). Ezekiel pleads with God to change the

recipe, and instead of human dung he is given cow's dung to eat. He says: "Ah, Lord GOD! Indeed I have never defiled my soul from my youth till now; I have never eaten what died of itself or was torn by beasts, nor has abominable flesh ever come into my mouth" (Ezek.4:14). Dare we make a comparison and say that sin was doubly revolting to God? God hates sin and the Bible says that: "You are of purer eyes than to behold evil" (Hab.1:13). Sin and wrath mingle together in this cup.

The wrathful vengeance of God had been the reason John the Baptist had turned away from Jesus as the Messiah- he had not seen vengeance and judgment manifested in His ministry. This was purposeful on the part of Jesus. When he proclaimed His manifesto in the synagogue at Nazareth He omitted a vital part of the concluding sentence in Isaiah's prophecy: ". and the day of vengeance of our God." (Isa.61:2). This day and this hour of vengeance and wrath of God is now on Him. He had averted, until now, the judgment of God from men and proclaimed good news to the meek, liberty to the captives, and so on. All this good will was given freely in anticipation of His great work of salvation on the cross. But now the price of man's rebellion and sin has to be paid. (Rom.6:23).

Jesus' relation to His Father had been characterized by eternal submission and obedience and He came to earth declaring His continued intent to do the will of God:

*"Then I said, 'Behold, I have come -
In the volume of the book it is written of Me -
To do Your will, O God."*

Jesus said to Father: "Sacrifice and offering, burnt offerings, and offerings for sin You did not desire, nor had pleasure in them" (which are offered according to the law), then He said, "Behold, I have come to do Your will, O God." He takes away the first that He may establish the second." (Heb.10:7-9).

He had lived as a man by the same principal, and now by submitting to suffering and death for us He was completing His obedience to Father. Thus, according to Hebrews He was perfected in His humanity: "to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings." (Heb.2:10; 5:9). Father and Son "went both of them

together” to the cross (Gen.22:8). Paul writes that: “God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself.” (2Cor.5:19).

2) **Mark’s account (14:32-42)**

We hear Jesus pray: “**Abba Father**, all things are possible for You. Take this cup away from Me; nevertheless, not what I will, but what You will.” (Mk.14:36). This is the first time Abba has been found on the lips of Jesus. Abba addressed to the Father expresses the most intimate and unique relationship between Father and Son and implies full obedience to the will of Father. Jesus’ obedience implies being willing to drink the cup of suffering and death on the cross. He was “obedient to death- even death on a cross” (Phil.2:8). This obedience springs from Jesus’ knowledge of Father’s love; it is based on trust and resulted in His final act of yielding and giving up Himself: “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit” (Lk.23:46).

Abba is not Hebrew, but Aramaic, the language of Jesus’ childhood and home. It was the common everyday language of the people around Him. Never before has God been addressed as Abba! It has been left untranslated, and found its way into the Greek speaking churches of the apostle Paul (Gal.4:6; Rom.8:15). In Aramaic it is the small child’s word for daddy; but in the context of Gethsemane Jesus is not speaking baby language, but He is speaking to His Father with deep intimacy. The prospect of the cross has drawn from the depths of Christ’s soul an exceptional intimacy that results in Him using Abba to address His Father and to offer Him obedience. Probably the best translation of Abba is: “Dear Father.” Matthew has the words: “O My Father” (26:42).

To embrace Father’s will mean drinking the cup. Paul gets to the heart of the matter when he says: “For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.” (2Cor.5:21). Closely linked with this verse is v19 of the same chapter: “God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation”. (2Cor.5:19). This verse destroys the lie that there was a contradiction between the Father’s will and that of Jesus. The issue in the Garden related to the clarification of Father’s will. How could there be conflict when we are

so familiar with the relationship of the Two? The central issue that bore down so heavily on the soul of Christ (Mat.26:37-38) was the matter of taking to Himself our sin- He who was the eternally Holy One. This is the truth Paul presents to us when He views the death of Jesus as a sin offering (2Cor.5:21).

3) Luke's account (22:39-47)

Luke describes the intensity of Jesus' suffering.

Matthew Henry, the Biblical commentator that Whitefield constantly read on his knees alongside his Bible, notes that there are three things found in this passage that are unique to Luke:

(1) When Christ was bowed down in agonizing prayer "an angel appeared to Him from heaven, strengthening Him" (22:43). It has been said that Jesus could have collapsed and died in the Garden. I think few would doubt that. In Hebrews we read that angels are ministering spirits, helping those who are heirs of salvation. Few have seen their ministry in helping those who are burdened intercessors. Christ drew on their resources to help Him through His sufferings. The angel Gabriel came three times to Daniel in his prolonged intercessions (Dan.8:15-27; 9:21; 10:10-21). He came each time as God's messenger and prophet and on both occasions touched Daniel, ministering to him strength from God (8:18; 10:10). Thus, we see a three-fold angelic ministry: (a) to bring encouragement from God, (b) to impart strength where the prophet had no strength (10:8) by his touch, and (c) to impart strength by prophetic words. Gabriel brought clarity to Daniel's visions by interpretation and revelation. No doubt Gabriel brought to Jesus words of comfort and strength as God's messenger, speaking to Jesus words of Messianic prophecy that applied to Him in His hour of greatest need; and imparting to Him God's strength by his touch. Satan has his own angelic messengers (they are fallen angels). Paul knew this when he described his thorn in the flesh as "the messenger of Satan to buffet me" (2Cor.12:7). God's messengers are sent to strengthen and deliver us.

(2) Another unique piece of information refers to further agonizing intercession: "And being in agony, He prayed more earnestly" (Lk.22:44). These agonies are the

unutterable groanings of the Spirit described by Paul (Rom.8:26).⁸ They are unutterable apart from the strivings of the Spirit in intercession. “Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered” (Rom.8:26). Only Christ experienced the agonies resulting from bearing our sin. Only He is unutterably holy. Because He is holy as His Father is holy He could yield Himself to God’s wrath against all sin and pay sins price. Also, because He is holy He could destroy sins power and triumph over death and Satan. Death and the curse are the consequence of universal and widespread sin (Rom.6:23; Gal.3:13).

These agonized intercessory prayers of Jesus are described in **Hebrews 5:7-8**:

“Who, in the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears to Him who was able to save Him from death, and was heard because of His godly fear, though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered.” (Heb.5:7-8).⁹

These verses describe Jesus’ life of prayer, and apply particularly to Gethsemane. Thus, we see that Jesus prevailed in prayer, in that God answered His specific prayer. We must see that agony in prayer, burden in prayer, tears in prayer, is not an end in itself. These things accompany earnest prayer. They are the evidences in our flesh and soul of the Spirit’s travailing. Prayer is not an end in itself. Accomplishment and victory are the outcome of successful prayer. We read that Jacob “prevailed with God” (Gen.32:28). He attained the objective of his intercessions. We see the result the next day in his meeting with his estranged brother- instead of hostility he is greeted with warmth and affection (Gen.33:4).

⁸ See NOTE 3.

⁹ See NOTE 2.

Many Christians do not know how to pray effectively, and so gain answers to their prayers. Many do not seem to be disturbed when there are no answers to prayer - they are content just to have prayed and reminded God of what He already knows! How much time is wasted by people in prayer meetings, going over endless information that God knows already. Why do we tell Him about all these things? We do it because God is our Father and He delights to hear us and to answer our prayers. Many Christians do not know what to do when they are burdened by the Holy Spirit. There seem to be too few of God's children who relish prayer. Prayer is addictive. The more you engage in prayer the more you will receive of the Spirit of grace and supplication (Zech.12:10).

Hebrews 5:7 gives to us an example of prevailing prayer. This passage refers to Jesus' Gethsemane praying. Father answered the prayers and supplications that Jesus offered up to Him "with strong crying and tears." What exactly was the focus of Jesus' prayer? Specific prayer is necessary to be effective prayer. When we discussed the night of prayer prior to appointing the twelve disciples, we said that Jesus spent this time in prayer to focus His mind on the men of God's choice. There is a specific petition that Father will deliver Him "from death." The King James translation is unhelpful here. Father did not save Him from death! The Greek preposition "ek" which means "out of" holds the key that unlocks the meaning. Did God deliver Jesus "out of" death? Yes, of course He did! He raised Him out of death-out of the tomb, but Jesus had first to go into death. He died. His body was taken down from the cross and put into a tomb. "Christ died for our sins- according to the Scriptures (1Cor.15:3).

Prevailing prayer, by its very definition is prayer that God answers. It has also been called the "prayer of faith" and may be illustrated from the lives of George Muller, Hudson Taylor, Fraser of Lisuland and others. I recommend Finney's "Lectures on Revival" and the chapter entitled "The Prayer of Faith." Before the outbreak of revival intercessors have prevailed in earnest prayer and prayed the "prayer of faith" resulting in a strong assurance that God has answered their prayers for

revival. Gethsemane provides a pattern for prevailing and triumphant prayer.¹⁰ For prayer to be answered it must have a clear objective. What was the future prize that brought such joy to Jesus? It was the salvation of precious men and women; the souls for whom He was willing to die. It was for the Bride of Christ, the church, "Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her." (Eph.5:25). Note the order here; He loved her before He died for her. She is the focus and the objective of His intercessions. True prayer is born in the heart. It was for love's sake that He endured and despised the shame. It was because of love that He gladly gave His life to redeem His Bride.

The prize was of such infinite worth to Him that God was prepared to redeem us at the cost of His Son's life. We have been redeemed with His own precious blood (Eph.2:13; 1Pet.1:18-19). Prayer played a vital part in that redemption. God does not save souls apart from prayer. Mission without prayer will be fruitless. Prayer apart from engagement in mission is to tempt God. Prayer is the heart of mission and evangelism and preaching are the hands and feet which provide the means of fulfilling our prayers for the salvation of souls. The immense fruitfulness of Jesus' mission was the result of prayer and was blessed because He embraced the cross at the beginning of His ministry in the anticipation of His death on the cross. He forgave sins with authority because He was later to give His life for the sins of the world.

God sees our future clearly marked out for us because He sees who we are and knows our priorities and core values. We need God to change us, but Jesus did not need such fundamental change. When we are truly engaged in prayer and the Spirit is upon us we are changed! We often find that God has to change us to fulfil our prayers! But this is not the objective of prayer. The objective of prayer is to pray the prayers of God and to receive answers to our prayers. Before we can pray the prayer of faith we have to know God's will and God's promises in the context of each situation. This is what Jesus is doing here, seeking Father's will. The promises

¹⁰ For further exposition of this verse in Hebrews (5:7) see NOTE (1) at the end of this essay.

of God sustained Him through His ordeal of suffering. Assurance of Father's will give Jesus the sword of the Spirit that cuts through the intense darkness of Satan's kingdom. Jesus fought and won in Gethsemane! Hallelujah.

(3) The third statement of information follows directly from the agony that Luke has just described, "Then His sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground" (Lk.22:44).

These two parts put back together read thus: "And being in agony, He prayed more earnestly. Then His sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground." (Lk.22:44).

This intensity of prayer takes us beyond anything in the annals of intercessors on record, but never before has so much been at stake. The salvation of the world hangs on Jesus' success in prayer. His praying is costly to Himself, and He is paying a price incomprehensible to man. And yet He is a man, vulnerable and limited in His human resources, dependent upon the Divine resources available to Him. The Holy Spirit is on Him still; no longer for miracles but empowerment for strength and endurance. The Holy Spirit is on Him for prayer. The pressure on Jesus precipitates sweat pouring out of His body, and then blood also begins to flow, "sweat mingled with blood". This was Gethsemane's intercessions. The beginning of "the shedding of blood" (Heb.9:22) began at Calvary when He was scourged with a Roman whip, His brow pierced with a crown of thorns and His hands and feet nailed to the cross. Blood drains away human life and unendurable weakness results in death. Jesus grappled and struggled with the onset of weakness resulting from the loss of His blood. Paul says: "Jesus was crucified by weakness, but lives by the power of God." This is my Jesus who suffered and died for me. Paul says: "The Son of God who loved me, and gave Himself for me" (Gal.2:20).

Gethsemane was the antechamber to the cross. He prayed privately in the company of His chosen companions but He died publicly in the company of a hostile crowd who jeered and mocked Him. From the betrayal of Jesus to His death He was separated from His disciples. He was totally alone and exposed to His enemies. He was a prisoner. Everything that happened to Him was in public view, except for those hours when He was hidden by darkness from their gaze. He was a prisoner, helpless to move independently, or to defend Himself - which He did not do, and He

was completely at the mercy of His captors. A crucifixion was no place for you to be. Make a note of those whom Jesus loved who were with Him in those dark hours of suffering. Have you noticed how many times it is recorded that He was “crucified”?

May we say that throughout the entire crucifixion Jesus was engaged in prayer? Luke does not tell us. There is only one way to approach the cross and that is to reflect on the seven utterances of Jesus from the cross recorded in the four gospels. My plan is to continue on the central theme of prayer which will take us into the book of Acts. The prayer life of Jesus is marked by Him praying alone. Following the Ascension we find the disciples immediately engage in corporate prayer. This is true of all prayer in the early church. The two aspects of prayer are vitally important for us in each of our lives.

Isaiah 53:11 refers to Jesus’ prevailing prayer:

“He shall see the labour (travail) of His soul, and be satisfied” (Isa.53:11).

Isaiah associates the deep intercessions of the Spirit with the pains of a mother as she labours in child birth:

*“Before she was in labour, she gave birth;
Before her pain came,
She delivered a male child.
Who has heard such a thing?
Who has seen such things?
Shall the earth be made to give birth in one day?
Or shall a nation be born at once?
For as soon as Zion was in labour,
She gave birth to her children.
Shall I bring to the time of birth, and not cause delivery?” says the LORD.
Shall I who cause delivery shut up the womb?” says the Lord. (Isa.66:7-9).*

Paul speaks the same language,

“My little children, for whom I labour in birth again until Christ is formed in you” (Gal.4:19). This verse implies that Paul had originally birthed these believers through travailing prayer.

10 PRAYER THAT PREPARES FOR PENTECOST (LK.22:49; ACTS 1:8, 14)

The disciples return from witnessing the ascension of Jesus and return to Jerusalem with great joy (Lk.24:52). They are found continually in the temple praising and blessing God. This is how Luke concludes his gospel. The account of Luke in Acts presents an accompanying picture of the 120 disciples gathered in an upper room for 24/7 prayer until the Holy Spirit was poured out upon them. To include the descent of the Holy Spirit on them on the Day of Pentecost reminds us of the descent of the Spirit on Jesus in the Jordan. I refer you my Notes on “The Prayer Life of the Early Church”.

END NOTES

NOTE (1)

The invisibility of the Holy Spirit requires visible symbols & evidences as tokens of His presence and actions.

One of the attributes of the “Spirit” is invisibility; the Father is also a Spirit and thus is invisible. Jesus also as a Spirit before His incarnation was invisible - hence, the importance of the Son of God taking on flesh and becoming a man to share our humanity. He was immediately visible, accessible and comprehensible to fellow humans. John, in his first letter expresses this: “That which was from the beginning, which we have *heard*, which we have *seen* with our eyes, which we have *looked* upon, and our hands have *handled*, of the Word of life.” (1Jn.1:1; see also v2). Jesus is the image of the invisible God (Col.1:15). You can’t see or handle a spirit! Because God is a Spirit and invisible it was necessary to show His presence by visible symbols, or by a voice. Both were present here- the symbol of the dove for the Spirit and the voice of the Father. With regard to His descent from heaven it was visualized by the symbol of a dove. The dove came to rest on the Lamb and to remain on Him throughout His earthly life. Without the symbol John would not have known what was taking place in the spirit realm.

A further symbol of the Spirit’s baptism given here is fire. Among Jesus’ last words before He ascended was this prophecy of John Baptist referring to the immanent baptism of the Holy Spirit and fire. God fulfilled this prophecy even to the individual tongues of fire that sat upon each of their heads.

The symbol or token of God’s presence to Israel was the cloud, the fire and the voice of God from the tabernacle. Similarly, at Sinai God had given symbols indicating His presence, but He gave no symbol to represent Himself; The invisible Jehovah spoke directly to them by His voice (Deut.4:12, 15). The reason God gave no tangible revelation of Himself was to avoid idolatry. If the Israelites had seen some representative form or symbol of God they would have given to it a tangible form- like the golden calf and immediately fallen down and worshipped the image

of God. Jehovah waited until He could give a full and complete revelation of Himself in the Person of the Lord Jesus (Hebrews 1:2-3).

On the Day of Pentecost there were outward manifestations of the Spirit's action-clear tokens of His presence: the sound of the mighty wind, the visible symbol of the tongues of fire, and the sound of various languages known to those who were there from the far flung reaches of the Roman Empire. Because the Spirit is invisible these tokens of His presence and actions are very important for us. When the household of Cornelius received the Holy Spirit, Luke says: "the Holy Spirit fell on them" (Acts 10:44). Those who were present did not see this happen, but they knew it had happened by the outward token or evidence. On this occasion the evidence was not by symbol but by sound: "for they heard them speak with tongues" (10:46). The inward work of the Holy Spirit in the heart of these Gentile believers is described by Peter as the same as that which they had experienced on the Day of Pentecost: "So God, who knows the heart, acknowledged them by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as He did to us, and made no distinction between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith" (Acts 15:8-9).

There are manifold ways we recognise the presence and actions of the Holy Spirit. There are times when we have a sense of His presence and times when He manifests Himself by His anointing; but He also makes communion with God possible and enables us to live together in fellowship as the children of God. I have not referred to the inward witness of the Holy Spirit in the conscience, bearing witness with my spirit that I am a child of God (Rom:15, 16). In the baptism of the Holy Spirit the whole heart in all its parts is diffused with the Spirit. Symbols and voices may not be necessary when we consider the inward work of the Spirit in the heart and the revelation that God has given to us by the Spirit in the Scriptures. Jesus says to us: "He that loves Me.... I will manifest Myself to him." (Jn.15:21)

NOTE (2)

Exposition of Hebrews 5:7

These verses describe the agony of Jesus as he prayed in Gethsemane. There seems to be an apparent contradiction between the prayer of Jesus to be spared from death and what actually happened, in that He had to suffer death. How then were

His prayers answered? My explanation is that He had to go *into* death, to be delivered *out of* (ek) death. God answered His prayer by raising Him from the dead. Some believe there was an immediate answer to prayer as He was strengthened to face the ordeal of the cross.

At the end of the verse we read that: “He was heard in that He **feared**.”

If this was the normal word for fear we would make a direct link with Gen.22.12.

*“Do not lay your hand on the lad, or do anything to him; for now I know that you **fear** God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me.”*

The content and typological significance of Genesis Ch.22 links the two passages together, quite apart from the reference to fear. Abraham submits to God (Father) and Jesus submits also to Father. However, it is Jesus who dies not Abraham. Isaac is the one who “in a figure” dies. But the typology is so rich in meaning adding significance to the real act of Jesus dying. Hebrews employs this historical event to demonstrate Abraham’s faith in resurrection (Heb.11:17).

The word in Hebrews (5:7) is not *φοβος* (fear) but *εὐλάβεια* which may be translated as: “He was heard on account of His pious resignation” (Dean Alford: “Geek Testament” Vol.4; p96). The English Standard Version puts it nicely: “He was heard because of His reverence.” If we remove the word “piety” and insert the words “reverent submission” or “godly fear” we arrive at a similar position to the ESV. We sense a finely tuned intimacy between Jesus and Father as He chooses unconditional resignation to Father’s will whatever the costly consequences. Jesus, like Abraham is aware that so much hangs on His momentous choice. Abraham faced what no other human father has had to confront; the killing of his own son at God’s command- hence the fear. God was looking intently at him, hoping and believing in this “strong man of faith” (Rom.4:20; Heb.11:17-19).

The salvation of the whole world was at stake here. Father was dependant on Jesus alone to accomplish His eternal plan of salvation. In Christ alone is there hope for the world. There is salvation in no other Person. God’s plans for humankind at this

moment relied entirely on Jesus Christ. Should not Jesus tremble before God in the light of such momentous responsibility? God had no other contingency plan- there was no other way to bring salvation to the world.

Could Jesus have failed? Could He have chosen not to reverently submit Himself to His father's will? To disobey He would have undone His relationship with Father who was His head (1Cor.11:3) and denied His own understanding of His relationship with Him. Disobedience is not only unthinkable but impossible when we speak of Jesus the Son of God. However, to speak of Jesus according to His own description as Son of Man we immediately move outside of Deity and have to view things in the context of His humanity. As a man it was not impossible for Him to fail. But He did not fail! True to Messianic affirmation and expectation:

“He will not fail nor be discouraged,
Till He has established justice in the earth;
And the coastlands shall wait for His law.” (Isa.42:4).

The momentous challenge of the cross necessitated indescribable suffering. It required fortitude sustained by faith under severe temptation, resolve that was challenged through pain and endurance that enable Him to endure the long hours of crucifixion: “He endured as seeing Him who is invisible” (Heb.11:27). He endured to the end that we might be saved (Mat.10:22), “not accepting deliverance;” that He “might obtain a better resurrection” (Heb.11:35).

NOTE (3)

The ministry of the Holy Spirit in prayer

Paul says: “I will pray with my S/spirit, and I will also pray with my understanding” (1Cor.14:15 see also Eph.6:18).¹¹ It is clear from v.2; v.14 and v.19 that here Paul is referring to tongues and he is describing his own prayer life. I have written an article on the Prayer revival in Kenya and the importance of tongues as a prayer language. “Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses: “For we do not know

¹¹ “God’s Empowering Presence” Gordon D. Fee. Pg 229-230.

what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God” (Rom.8:26-27).¹² The first ministry of the Spirit is to assist us. We need His assistance because of our present weakness. While we wait in hope for Christ’s return the Spirit assists us in prayer, helping us to endure. He strengthens us.

The second ministry of the Spirit is to intercede for us. The verses here correspond well with the verses in Corinthians- both make the Spirit the subject of “interceding.” The Spirit Himself prays from within us, and in both cases He is saying things beyond our mental grasp (Fee G). The Holy Spirit is interceding for us with unutterable groans. The manifestation of such intercession we meet in Gethsemane.

(I recommend that you read the three chapters on revival praying in Charles Finney’s “Lectures on Revival”).

¹² Ibid. pp 575-586

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