

# Jesus and Prayer

## *a Messianic survey*

A cursory look at the life of Jesus shows that prayer was not just important to Him; He lived His life on this earth as if it was vital. This short essay does not attempt to exhaustively look at Jesus and prayer. Rather it is a little survey of the gospels, hitting the highlights of what Jesus the Messiah taught us about prayer and the legacy He left for our own prayer life. The aim is not to fill our heads with knowledge about prayer. Rather it is to pump our hearts with inspiration to pray and lead us to pray as He prayed. Philip Yancey, in his great book, *Prayer, Does It Make Any Difference*, poses the question—why pray? Here is what he says, “I have said that the simplest answer to the question ‘why pray?’ is ‘because Jesus did.’” (Yancey, pg. 78). For the follower of Christ it really should be that simple.

### ***Praying with God as the center of life***

Jesus’ prayers and what He taught us about prayer revealed the priority of His heart—His Father. In His prayer recorded in John 17 He prays that the Father would glorify Himself. He calls the Father the only true God and acknowledges that eternal life is found in the knowledge of God. When the disciples asked Jesus to teach them to pray (Luke 11:1) He told them to pray about the hallowing of the name of the Father, asking that His will would be done on earth as it is in heaven and that His kingdom would come (Matthew 6:9-10).

Watching Jesus rise early in the morning to pray and often spending all night praying is also evidence of the central place the Father played in the life of Jesus (Mark 1:35; Luke 6:12). And perhaps the most revealing place where we see Jesus humbly yield Himself to the Father and His will, in prayer, is in the garden of Gethsemane; there He agonized in prayer to the point of bleeding from His brow over what He was facing, pleading with His Father to take it away yet ultimately expressing His desire for His Father’s will to be accomplished over and above Him being saved from suffering (Matthew 26:36f).

### ***Prayers that get the attention of the Father***

There are places in the Bible that teach us that our prayers can be hindered and not heard by God (Job 27:8-9; Proverbs 15:9, 21:13; Isaiah 1:15; John 9:31; 1 Peter 3:7). However, Jesus points us in directions which gain the attention of the Father, prayers to which He will respond. Jesus teaches us that while we should not be like hypocrites who pile up words and repetitively hound God (Matthew 6:7), we should persist in prayer, asking in faith, believing that we have received what we request (Luke 18:1f; Matthew 21:22; Mark 11:24). According to Jesus it was the humble tax collector and not the Pharisee who was heard by God and rewarded for his prayers (Luke 18:9f). And those who forgive everyone they have issues against are heard by the Father (Mark 11:25).

### *Praying like Jesus prayed*

We have many prayer warriors in the history of the church we can look to as examples of great praying. However, Jesus is the example of what a prayer life should look like. He lived as if He was dependant upon prayer and all appearances betray His love for communing with His Father in prayer. He most likely followed Jewish tradition and prayed three times a day at the synagogue (the house of prayer—Matthew 21:13). As has already been mentioned, we are told that He often rose early in the morning, before daylight, to spend time in prayer with His Father. On more than one occasion He amazingly spent all night praying. He lived what He taught; in Matthew 6:6 He tells us to pray in our rooms, alone, to the Father who is in secret. We see Jesus in at least four passages going off to be alone to pray (Matthew 14:23; Mark 6:46; Luke 5:16, 9:18).

Jesus never prayed detached from His emotions. He was emotionally wrapped up in what He was praying and was not afraid to show His Father exactly what He was feeling (Matthew 26:36f; Hebrews 5:7). However, His emotional state never interfered with His reverence for the Father as we see in Him kneeling to pray (Luke 22:41). And, if I may, there seems to be times where in His humanity He wrestled with confusion and wondered why (cf. the Messianic psalms—Psalm 22. Also recall when He was on the cross He cried out to the Father wondering why He was forsaking Him—Matthew 27:46).

Jesus' high priestly prayer in John 17 is saturated with His unmistakable love for His body, the church. He asks the Father to keep us in the Father's name, for our unity and oneness, that we would be kept from the evil one, that we would be sanctified in the truth of His Word and He expresses His desire that we would be with Him. Virtually the entire prayer of John 17 has to do with the church.

If praying to the Father held this place in the Savior's life, why doesn't it in our lives? If Jesus, who was fully divine while on this earth, desired to pray often and for long periods of time, why don't we? If Jesus' prayers rarely concerned Him, but rather focused on the glory of God and what He desires, why don't ours? If prayer does not matter, then Jesus was deluded, misguided and wasted a lot of time. We know, at least in our heads, that prayer does matter. Let us plead with God to arouse within us an irresistible passion for praying, like Jesus prayed. I close with one more quote from Philip Yancey:

“When doubts creep in and I wonder whether prayer is a sanctified form of talking to myself, I remind myself that the Son of God, who had spoken worlds into being and sustains all that exists, felt a compelling need to pray. He prayed as if it made a difference, as if time He devoted to prayer mattered every bit as much as the time he devoted to caring for people” (Yancey pg. 79)