

In Prayer to God

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[0 : 0 0] All right, well, we're continuing our way through the Gospel of Luke this morning, and we're coming to a new part of the story today. Luke's just finished walking us through some of Jesus' early run-ins with the Pharisees and the teachers of the law.

And now we come to sort of a pivotal moment in the story as Jesus selects 12 men from among his followers, and he does some spectacular signs which many witnessed. We're picking things up in Luke chapter 6, starting in verse 12.

One of those days, Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray and spent the night praying to God. When morning came, he called his disciples to him and chose 12 of them, whom he also designated apostles. Simon, whom he named Peter, his brother Andrew, James, John, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James, son of Alphaeus, Simon, who was called the Zealot, Judas, son of James, and Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor.

He went down with them and stood on a level place. A large crowd of his disciples was there, and a great number of people from all over Judea, from Jerusalem, and from the coastal region around Tyre and Sidon, who had come to hear him and to be healed of their diseases.

[1 : 4 6] Those troubled by impure spirits were cured, and the people all tried to touch him because power was coming from him and healing them all.

So this big day starts out with Jesus going up the mountainside to pray. And I know there's a lot to get to here, but I can't help but think that we should just slow down for a minute and think about that.

Jesus spent time talking to God. Talking with God. It's easy for us to get fixated on the truth that Jesus has come down from the Father to speak to us.

But here we see Jesus slipping away from us, going up the mountainside to talk to God. It's also easy for us to be captured by the reality that Jesus is himself God.

And that's certainly true, and it's very clearly taught in the Bible, and a wonderful truth. But sometimes our fixation on that can cause us to miss what is also true.

[2 : 5 9] That Jesus is truly one of us. He is truly a man. And as every man ought to do, so Jesus does too. He prays to God.

Now this is sometimes hard to get our minds around. We wonder, wait a second, if Jesus is God, and he's praying to God, then does that mean that Jesus is praying to himself?

This was a question asked me by one of my own kids recently. It's a profound mystery that's laid out in the scriptures for us. God is only one God, and yet he exists as three persons.

Jesus referred to God as his father. The father spoke down from heaven, referring to Jesus as his son.

And then there is the spirit of God, or the Holy Spirit, who's also called the spirit of Jesus. Father, son, Holy Spirit. He said, We see and hear all three at the baptism of Jesus.

[4 : 1 6] All three are named in the Great Commission. And yet there's also a profound unity. Jesus said, I and the Father are one.

He also said, If you have seen me, you have seen the Father. So if we're looking for a familiar parallel to this in our own experience, or in nature, there is none.

That's what makes God holy and distinct from us. He is a tri-personal deity. And so it will seem strange to us. Along with this mysterious truth is also the truth of who Jesus is.

He is both God, truly God, and man. Truly human. Both at the same time.

As John said in his gospel, right at the beginning, the word who was God and was with God, the one through whom all things were made, he became flesh and dwelt among us.

[5 : 28] And this is another mystery, how God himself can exist truly as a human being, as one of us. And so, we might sometimes think that since Jesus is God, therefore prayer is not necessary for him.

And yet we read in the Bible that Jesus prayed. He talked to God. There is relationship. Real relationship and communication between Jesus and the Father. and sometimes we might wonder whether we're seeing this right because this sounds a little strange.

Let's just look for a moment somewhere else in the New Testament at 1 Peter 1, verse 3. This verse is one of my favorites. Peter, the apostle, writes, Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

That's part of how he starts the letter. Now we understand how God is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. At least, we've heard Jesus call God that many times in the Gospels.

[6 : 39] But easily, we skip over this other relationship mentioned here. Maybe just put your thumb over the words and Father for a moment. He is both, but just for a minute and read it.

Praise be to the God of our Lord Jesus Christ. Praise be to the God of our Lord Jesus Christ.

What I'm trying to help us notice here is that Jesus is so truly man that he has a relationship with God just like we do. He doesn't pray to himself.

Jesus prays to his God, the one who he is also one with. Think of what Jesus cried out on the cross. He said, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

He called his Father God. To put it another way, if there's anyone who it seems should not need to pray, at least in our judgment, it would be Jesus, right?

[7 : 46] After all, he is one with the Father. He's the one speaking to us what he hears from the Father. Is there any need for him to speak to the Father? Father? Well, we see here, the answer is yes.

Jesus prayed. He talked to God. God is a relational God. Relationship and communication are at the core of who he is.

when we're told in the Bible to pray, we're being told to have a relationship with God, to communicate with God.

Luke tells us here that Jesus prayed all night long. What's the first thing that you think of when you hear that? anyone?

How? How? We might be amazed or surprised. Most of us, if not all of us, have struggled to pray for more than an hour at a time.

[9 : 01] Sometimes much less than that. We know prayer is good. We know it's spiritual. And so we naturally respect and revere anyone who can engage in this holy activity for a long time.

And so in that sense, we're surprised that any man would pray all night long. We look at the disciples in the Garden of Gethsemane who fell asleep multiple times while praying.

Then we relate more to them. And so we look at this as amazing. But maybe on the other hand, we also look at it as something that was maybe just easier and natural for Jesus because of who he is. That special relationship that he has with God. And I think there's truth to that. I was trying to think of an analogy and this is what came to mind.

What if this moment for Jesus was in some ways, even in small ways, like, have you ever had a dear, dear friend, best of friends who you haven't talked to in ages suddenly show up to visit you and they're going to stay overnight but then they have to leave the next day.

[10 : 14] Is it any trouble to talk to them all evening and even to stay up until one, two in the morning for a total of four, five, six hours?

perhaps this is just a little bit of what Jesus' relationship with the Father is like. There's no doubt in Jesus' mind whether the Father is listening to every word.

He has been one with the Father for all eternity leading up to this moment. There's no greater intimacy, there's no closer relationship, it's like sheer joy and life and pleasure for Jesus to talk with God all night long like staying up all night with one's best friend.

Us, on the other hand, we've never had that relationship with God from the start like Jesus did and so naturally it will be different for us. For our part, there is faith that's required of us.

We're praying to the unseen God, the invisible God and we know that there is some way too that God doesn't commune with us identically to how he does with Jesus but one day he will.

[11 : 37] One day we will be with him face to face and I think we know in our hearts that when that day comes, having a conversation with him all night long will not be tiresome or difficult or boring.

I know that's a bit of a rabbit trail this morning but I hope it's a good one and I think out of that comes this question. How is your relationship with God going right now? Are you communicating with God regularly and often? Are you making time to be with him to pray? It's not just something that we're commanded to do it's vital and life-giving to do it. Or maybe the thing we need to ask more is what's keeping us from prayer?

What's distracting us from prayer? One of the big things that's consuming our attention and our focus and our thoughts is technology. We've got our phones we've got our TVs we've got our social media we've got YouTube the way these things are designed and engineered we get a little dopamine hit every time we refresh or every time we find something that we like as we scroll and swipe we get a little dopamine hit every time we see that someone liked our post or our pick and it becomes habit and even addiction for us to just pull out the devices the moment that we're bored or the moment that we have to wait for something the moment that we have some spare time what's the first thing that we often do in the morning?

[13 : 36] A survey done by Virgin Media in the UK found that 81% of Britons said they reach for their phones first thing in the morning when they wake up 75% said they're checking social media feeds 52% said they're checking news feeds 1 out of 3 of those who are polled said they're looking to reduce their screen time they kind of recognize that it's taking up too much of their time and attention half of those polled admitted to previously unsuccessful attempts to reduce screen time with the hardest things to cut down being social media messaging apps and video streaming stats like these tell us the truth of what's getting our time and our attention in the morning and why it seems nearly impossible to find time in our day to pray there's something powerful and addictive in our lives crowding prayer out and when it comes right down to it

I think if we know the Lord don't we often feel regret as the day goes on that we're going back and choosing that mindless dead scrolling of stuff that often has very little value or substance over fellowship with our Lord our Savior and so even just this glimpse of seeing Jesus go up the mountain to pray I hope and pray that it will spur us on and encourage us this week to put our tech away maybe make a few changes even to go to great lengths if necessary to be with God and to commune with God alright let's keep going verse 13 when morning came Jesus called his disciples to him and chose twelve of them whom he also designated apostles the picture we get from these words is that Jesus stayed up on the mountain but then and of course mountains in Israel we know are not the snowy peaks but they're large hills in Israel but then he calls his disciples to him so they come up to him and it says he chooses twelve of them which means that there were more than twelve before this and then in verse 17 we see Jesus went down with them so we get a clear picture here that there was a special moment where Jesus chose the twelve disciples up till now in the gospel of Luke we've heard about Peter and how he was called we heard about Levi the tax collector and how he was called from the tax booth and the other gospels tell us of Andrew and James and John and Philip and Nathaniel the reality is though that up until this point many people came to follow Jesus and were counted among his disciples from the start we read in John chapter 6 verse 66 about an occasion where many of

Jesus' disciples turned back and no longer followed him while the twelve continued to follow him and so it wasn't just that Jesus kind of slipped among the crowds and just picked twelve right from the start it was a whole bunch of disciples and now we see this moment where Jesus sets twelve of them apart from all the rest notice the language of choosing he called his disciples to him and chose twelve of them whom he also designated or named apostles apostles and so these twelve men they get this special designation from all the rest apostles the word apostle comes right out of the Greek language from the word apostolos and it means a person who is sent out it's often used in ways to describe a messenger or a delegate or an ambassador and we're going to impact this more deeply as we go along here the apostles come to have a very unique role in the plan of God we'll talk about that in future sermons especially as we get to

Luke chapter nine when Jesus actually sends them out and then enacts the acts of the apostles but for today let's just think of two essential elements of an apostle and we get these things from the word from how that word was used even before they were designated as such the first one to be an apostle it means to be a sent one implies that there has to be someone doing the sending it implies that those being sent represent the one who is sending and in this case it's Jesus he's choosing these twelve men and he's not sent them out yet but he's about to send them out as his representatives second the word apostle also commonly carried the meaning of messenger and

that really fits with the role that the apostles were given they will not only be representatives but they will be sent with a specific message from

[19 : 05] Jesus and we're going to hear more about that as well when we get to Luke chapter nine so Jesus is doing something very unique here he looks at this growing pool of his disciples and he chooses from among them all these twelve men and he designates them apostles it means that they will soon be sent out as his representatives and as his messengers and so even though this is just a small paragraph in Luke's gospel it marks a massive shift in how things are going to go from now on first it was just Jesus and the crowds all coming to him from everywhere but now it's going to be these men going out proclaiming Jesus proclaiming the kingdom and the crowds that are already large are about to get even bigger as we go from here let's talk for just a minute about who these twelve men are Luke seems to list them in order from most prominent to least at the top of the list is Simon also called

Peter and his brother Andrew both of them were fishermen from Galilee then there were James and his brother John the sons of Zebedee also fishermen from Galilee then there was Philip who is from the same town as Peter and Andrew and we don't know too much more about Philip he appears in the gospel of John as the one that the Greeks go to when they're seeking an audience with Jesus and there's also some dialogue between Philip and Jesus in the upper room discourse that we read in John chapters 14 to 16 apart from that not much else then we have Bartholomew he's scarcely mentioned in the New Testament but it's thought that he is Nathaniel from the gospel of John interestingly Bartholomew quite literally means son of Ptolemy

Bar son Ptolemy Ptolemy you can kind of hear it in the word so if Ptolemy was actually his dad's name then basically people called him Ptolemy son and likely Nathaniel was actually his given name then there's Matthew we already heard about him that's Levi also another name he was the tax collector that threw the banquet for Jesus then there's Thomas also known as doubting Thomas he missed the first big resurrection appearance of Jesus to the rest of the apostles and then he was skeptical till he saw Jesus alive for himself a week later then there's James son of Alphaeus he's only mentioned in the lists of the apostles very little is known about him today there's Simon the zealot another one only mentioned in the lists of apostles nowhere else in the in the new testament it's pure speculation but either zealot describes his own religious zeal like he was a very passionate devout person

Simon the zealous or it describes his background before Christ probably in the political movement which sought to overthrow the Roman empire with guerrilla warfare tactics they were known as the zealots and of course if you're making a television series about Jesus which one would you choose then there's Judas son of James this is also probably the same guy mentioned in Matthew and Mark's list as Thaddeus likely Judas was his primary name but then to distinguish him from the other Judas he may have been called Thaddeus either a nickname or second given name he's only mentioned as speaking once in the entire New Testament and it's in the Gospel of John again in that upper room discourse and then finally Judas who is quite well known as the one who betrayed Jesus so these are the twelve men that Jesus chose and designated apostles he's going to give them special authority a message to proclaim and a mission to complete verse 17 he went down with them and stood on a level place a large crowd of his disciples was there and a great number of people from all over

Judea from Jerusalem and from the coastal region around Tyre and Sidon who had come to hear him and to be healed of their diseases so Jesus and the twelve they come down the mountain!

[23 : 53] together and there's! this massive crowd of people waiting for them Luke describes it a large crowd of his disciples so many who are already followers of Jesus in some sense and then on top of that a great number of people from all over and then three regions are listed and one city maybe sounds a little flat in English a great number but some of the other translations say a great multitude so we're talking big crowd lots of people from all over let's just think where Jesus is for a moment he's up in Galilee probably up somewhere around Capernaum in the north and they are coming from all over Judea so that's the southern region way down here probably a three to five days journey on foot depending on where you start from how far south and how far north this mountain is they've traveled three to five days on foot to see

Jesus at the base of this mountain not only that but they're also coming from the regions of Tyre and Sidon so we see way up here in the north and depending again on how far north it could be about a three days journey from there and then lastly we hear that they're coming from Jerusalem

that famous great capital city in Judea and there's maybe a little bit of irony here usually Jerusalem is the destination that's the place you want to go that's where the temple of God is that's where the Jewish council is that's where the annual festivals are held it's the great city of the great kings David Solomon Hezekiah and yet all kinds of people Luke says from that city are traveling way up north to the boonies and are camped out at the base of an unspecified mountain looking for Jesus why are they here

Luke says they'd come to hear him and to be healed of their diseases Jesus and so already as Jesus is just choosing the twelve apostles who they will be word has spread almost a hundred miles to the north and almost a hundred miles to the south of the things he's saying and the things he's doing and what an amazing moment this was can you picture this Jesus is coming down the mountain with four fishermen a tax collector and seven other guys that they and we know almost nothing about and people who are very obviously possessed by demons are being cured in front of everyone those troubled by impure spirits were cured and the people all tried to touch him because power was coming from him and healing them all can you imagine this the gasping and the wonder and the amazement and the cheering and the celebration and as people are healed and others see it the desire of everyone in this great multitude is intensified to get closer some for healing for themselves others for healing for a friend or a loved one or even just to get close to see what all is happening and to hear the things

Jesus is saying and I love the language of proximity here power was coming from him and healing them all everyone who even made contact with him who touched him was healed it was a day of countless miracles of all kinds didn't matter what virus or disease or malady even demonic possession whatever condition they had when they came into contact with Jesus it was utterly vanquished and dispelled eliminated just like pure light overthrows the darkness in front of it and then Jesus begins to speak and we're going to save what he says for the next number of messages starting next week let's pray father in heaven we thank you for the glimpse you've given us as to what took place all those years ago with your son and as we see him up on that mountain talking to you we feel drawn we want to have something of that relationship that he has with you ourselves and so I pray that you would draw each one of us deeper into fellowship into friendship relationship with you fill our hearts with faith may this week be a week of prayer not just one time a day or at meals but all throughout each day and may we even feel closer to you than we ever have in our lives touch us and work in us we pray draw us close amen who