

Our church's important summer mission activities need our prayers. This subject of prayer is the next subject to be studied in our Teen Class on the Westminster Shorter Catechism in the Fall. In this week's notes, may we learn to value prayer from our Lord's own example and teaching!

Monday: Read John 13:1; John 18:4; John 17:1-5**Essential Dependence**

Given the triumphal statements of John 13:1 & 18:4, we could conclude that Christ's triumph over His foes was "in the bag." His victory was sure, and Satan's doom was sealed. Truly, all was under the control of God the Father and following His prophetic timetable. We would be correct to see Christ receive from His Father all authority to superintend the events leading up to His Cross - even down to the exact moment when Judas would step forward to betray His Lord. Read John 13:27-30 for a description of Christ's complete control, ordering Judas out to do His treacherous deed.

The natural question for us to ask may be: Why would Jesus take the time to pray for Himself in John 17:1-5 and for His church in John 17:6ff when He already knew that all things were in His hand – and victory was sure?

Though He was the Son of God and the perfect Son of Man, given all authority in Heaven and on earth, He nevertheless held onto His Father in prayer – especially when the rest of His disciples forsook Him. Because He was all alone and forsaken as the Sin-Bearer, with none to interpose between Him and the wrath of His Father against the sin which He bore, He must pray!

Meditate and Pray: Here is the first answer to why our Lord Jesus spent so much time in prayer – because He knew that the sheer *size* of His trials in our place, and the *weight* of our sin which He carried, *would require of Him tireless cries and prayer. He simply could not carry the weight of our guilt successfully without crying out to the Lord as each moment for His Fatherly support.*

In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence (Hebrews 5:7).

Tuesday: Read Hebrews 5:7 & Mark 14:32-42**Communion Essential to Obedience**

We meditated yesterday on prayer, essential *even from our Almighty Lord as He took our place*. As our sinless substitute, Christ was obedient to His Father in all things – including prayer. As our High Priest, He never appeared before God empty-handed but always had His hands full of the incense of prayer (to use John Owen's illustration). His love for His Father, and His commitment to suffer for us meant that He was constantly careful to provide His Father "a sweet-smelling savor" to go along with His sacrificial work. Think of it. Not only was Jesus Christ punctilious in His suffering what was required to satisfy His Father's justice, He was also committed to pleasing His Father in all things – especially in the sweet communion which He had in our nature with His Father in prayer. It was His love for the Father, along with the compassionate heart of Christ as our human High Priest, which drove Him to prayer. And He was heard (Hebrews 5:7) because of His obedience.

Meditate and Pray: Sing about Christ's tireless commitment to prayer as part of His obedient posture as our Savior, using hymn # 238 verses 1-2 from our red Trinity Hymnal:

1 My dear Redeemer and my Lord,
I read my duty in your Word;
but in your life the law appears,
drawn out in living characters.

2 Such was your truth, and such your zeal,
such deference to your Father's will,
such love, and meekness so divine,
I would transcribe and make them mine.

Weds/Thurs: Read Luke 22:40-46; Mk 14:41-42 & Mt 26:45-46

Stone's Throw Witnesses

If we need further help in appreciating how *crucial* Christ's life of prayer offered up to His Father was, consider the events that occurred in Gethsemane and on the Cross, see the pivotal role which Christ's prayers played at Gethsemane and on the Cross:

- Having sung a hymn after the Lord's Supper (Mark 14:26) Christ departs for Gethsemane where He will sweat blood in agonized prayer (Luke 22:44).
- Despite the prospect of His upcoming suffering, Christ decisively steps forward to face His betrayer and His arrest. He says repeatedly and courageously, "rise let us go," though He knows the horror that awaits Him (Mark 14:41-42 & Matthew 26:45-46).
- Such determination to go forward to meet His foes and His ultimate death (let it be noted) was because of His prayers in the Garden of Gethsemane.
- Moreover, as the Dutch scholar Klaus Schuylder says, Christ ensured that His disciples' proximity to Him in the Garden meant that they would hear His prayers – yes, a stone's throw, but no further (Luke 22:41).

Meditate and Pray: Sing about Christ's obedient determination – in prayer as well as godly deeds – to be our complete Savior, using hymn # 238, verses 3-4:

3 Cold mountains and the midnight air
witnessed the fervor of your prayer;
the desert your temptations knew,
your conflict and your vict'ry too.

4 Be thou my pattern; make me bear
more of your gracious image here;
then God the Judge shall own my name
amongst the foll'wers of the Lamb.

Fri/Sat: Read John 17:1-18:4**Preparation for Victory**

“Whom do you seek?” What dauntless military bearing Jesus had summoned in himself to march forward and confront the foe. The sheer level of opposition to proves that, contrary to that old gospel hymn, there is no such guarantee *to make even one hour of prayer predictably sweet*. Prayer is part of our Christian warfare, as it was for Christ. It is hard often, and not necessarily sweet. For example, if we are to read John 14:31 correctly, Christ left the Upper Room at the end of John 14, and as He walked to Gethsemane, opened His heart in His teaching about the vine (John 15) and the ministry of the Holy Spirit (John 16). Then, as the deep trial and shadow which in Gethsemane drew near, Christ was driven to prayer on the very edge of crossing the brook Kidron (John 18:1) and entering the Garden. That prayer is what we have in John 17. (This outline of John 15-17 comes from New Testament scholar A.T. Robertson).

And this emphasis on Christ’s prayer, preparing the way for Christ’s victory on the Cross, is full of encouragement, isn’t it? John 17 was the sweet-smelling incense which Christ offered up before going into the Holy of Holies in the Garden (John 18). *Before Christ prayed in agony in Gethsemane, He prayed triumphantly for His Church of all time to be “kept from the evil one,”* (John 17:15). Thus the victory was won in prayer *before the blood of His sweat in Gethsemane and shed on the Cross!*

Meditate and Pray: Such an understanding of the prayer of John 17 as preparation for the prayers of Gethsemane help us to understand the power of the prayers of Christ on our behalf. In other words, Christ prays His victory into our lives. Before there is one deliverance from illness, temptation or trial, Christ prays that answer into being. May we learn, in His likeness, to pray victories into our lifetimes, trusting that it is in our private and corporate times of prayer, transacting with the Father, through the Son, in the power of the Spirit, that God’s Kingdom work is accomplished in our own day, though never fully and finally until the Final Day.

Sunday: Read Heb 5:7; Mk 1:35-39 & Jn 18:1-9**We Are Not Abandoned in Prayer**

The question we are contemplating this week is why the All-Sufficient Son of God in our flesh should find the need to pray. Why did Jesus hold onto His Father in prayer each day of His ministry?

The first answer is that, in God’s economy, prayer is *an abandoned area of failure* for all of Adam’s race which Christ, as the Last Adam, must put right. He came to restore communion as a godly, sinless man between God the Father and the lost, rebellious sons of Adam.

But He also came as King to *save His people by His prayers*. In terms of John 17-18, Christ our King crosses the brook Kidron (as David did in 2 Samuel 15:23) determined to wield the sword of prayer in John 17 to ensure (John 18:9) that He had not “lost one of those the Father gave Him.”

Finally, as our Priest, Christ makes His sacrificial ministry on the Cross to be a “sweet-smelling aroma” to the Lord by prayer.

But our last answer as to why Christ found it so necessary to pray is to remember His prayers as His only support when He was all alone and forsaken as the Sin-Bearer. With no one to interpose between Him and the wrath of His Father against the sin which He bore, He must pray in order to bear the weight of the guilt of His people to the Cross!

It is in such dire moments of need that Christ's habit of prayer takes on its most beautiful quality. Sadly, in contrast to Christ, who found prayer to be His constant joy, it is at such desperate moments that our stubborn knees finally learn to bow.

Not a prayer till then ... No cries till our hearts are brought down and our hopes are all dead—then we cry, but not before. So many offer what they call prayer when things are good, and think well of themselves, but in very deed the only real cry to God is that which is forced out of us by a sense of utter helplessness and misery. Charles Spurgeon

Meditate and Pray: Teach us, Lord, through times most desperate, that where we are weak we are indeed strong, because in true desperation we realize our dependency on our Lord.

Hear my cry, O God,
listen to my prayer;
from the end of the earth I call to you
when my heart is faint.
Lead me to the rock
that is higher than I,
for you have been my refuge,
a strong tower against the enemy. Psalm 61: 1-2