

Intro:

For our message on prayer today we come to another passage where there is just a hint about prayer.

The event described by our passage is a very significant one, recorded in all three Synoptic Gospels and referred to twice by Peter in his epistles.

The event I am talking about is the Transfiguration.

Only Luke mentions that Jesus was praying at the beginning of this event, so it is to his Gospel we turn.

Read Luke 9.28-36

Passages like this aren't intended to teach a great deal about prayer, at least not as their primary instruction.

However, with diligent study, I think we can find enough in this to teach us an important aspect of what the Lord expects prayer to accomplish in the life of his disciples.

I have entitled this message:

Prayers of Discipleship

The idea we will be working on is this:

Proposition: Private prayer is a means of discipleship; when you pray, you draw close to heaven and heaven draws close to you.

I. Private lessons: calling individual disciples aside

A. The context

1. The Transfiguration occurs near Caesarea Philippi, which is where Peter's confession takes place (9.18-27)
 - a. Note that the occasion of the Confession was also a season of prayer, the Lord and his disciples (18)
 - b. Peter makes his confession about the Lord

Luke 9:20 He said unto them, But whom say ye that I am? Peter answering said, The Christ of God.

Mark 8:29 And he saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am? And Peter answereth and saith unto him, Thou art the Christ.

Matthew 16:16 And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.

¹⁷And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed *it* unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven.

c. The confession marks a change in the Lord's ministry – after this point he begins to emphasize his death, burial and resurrection

1) Peter objects to this teaching

2) The Lord rebukes him (recorded by both Matthew and Mark)

2. On this day, they are about one week later

a. Matthew and Mark say six days

b. Luke says eight days

Difference could simply be that Mt and Mk are only counting the days between the two events and not the days of the event themselves.

B. A tighter group: only a few disciples are called to this event

1. The disciples are Peter, John and James

a. This is a group that is marked out on other occasions in the gospels

1) At the raising of Jairus' daughter, only Peter, James, and John are permitted to see the event (Mk 5.37, Lk 8.51)

2) Peter, James, and John [along with Andrew] ask the questions that bring about the Olivet Discourse, the Lord's sermon on the end of the world (Mk 13.3)

3) At the prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane, the Lord called these same three to his side as he prayed (Mt 26.37, Mk 14.33)

b. The other disciples are only seen speaking to the Lord individually or as part of the whole group

These disciples, though, seem to be singled out for a reason – this session is to be instructive, especially for them, and becomes part of our whole understanding of who Christ is.

2. They are called ‘up into a mountain’
 - a. Likely Mt Hermon, although tradition says Mt Tabor
 - b. The occasion involves some effort, climbing the heights to a private place

II. Purposeful prayers: discerning the discipleship intention

- A. The call up the mountain was ‘to pray’ – prayer on purpose (28)
 1. The Lord is not calling them to lead in prayer, rather to accompany Him in prayer
 2. The Lord was accompanied by the whole band the week before, as we noted (Read whole section now, Lk 9.18-27)
 - a. Note: not purposeful, but ‘attendant circumstance’ – “as he was praying”
 - b. Note: Luke doesn’t record Peter’s rash statement or the Lord’s rebuke
 - 1) The Lord’s prayer leads into the Lord’s question “Who am I”
 - 2) Peter’s answer seems to almost be the response the Lord was looking for in his prayer
 - c. Note: the part that Peter did rebuke the Lord for is the new teaching about his death, burial, and resurrection which is included here
 - d. Luke also adds more material concerning the second coming and the Kingdom – these are essential themes to keep in mind
- B. As the Lord prays, he is transfigured before them (29)
 1. Elijah and Moses appear and talk with him
 2. Note the subject they are discussing: “and spake of his decease which he should accomplish at Jerusalem.”
 - a. ‘Decease’ = lit., ‘exodus’
 - b. Also the specificity: ‘about to accomplish’

3. What was the Lord praying about?
 - a. We don't know – many assume the prayer is connected to Gethsemane
 - 1) Same three called alongside
 - 2) Same concern: the passion (death)
 - b. It is quite possible that the prayer was about the Lord's coming death on the cross, the transfiguration and the conversation with Moses and Elijah the specific answer
4. What is the Lord's purpose in calling the disciples alongside for this prayer?
 - a. It is a prayer *for* discipleship: a training prayer
 - b. Remember the subjects running through these verses are:
 - 1) Betrayal
 - 2) Death in Jerusalem
 - 3) The judgement to come/Second coming
 - 4) The Kingdom
 - c. What was Peter's reaction to these subjects? Denial [and he may have spoken for the others]
 - d. Now, one week later, the Lord calls Peter, John, James ... come *to pray* ...

“In fact, through the Transfiguration, Jesus assists the disciples in developing a right understanding about his passion (3:21; 5:16; 9:18–27) by allowing them to preview the glory of Jesus' exaltation after the cross.”¹

I don't know if that quotation gets the whole lesson – but surely this is part of it.

Prayer is for discipleship: you grow in your understanding of the Word as you pray about what the Lord says in His Word. Or, as we said in the proposition:

Proposition: Private prayer is a means of discipleship; when you pray, you draw close to heaven and heaven draws close to you.

But I want you to see one more thing about this, something Peter got in his spiritual maturity:

¹ Kyu Sam Hana, “Theology of Prayer in the Gospel of Luke”, *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society Volume 43* (The Evangelical Theological Society, 2000; 2002). 43:684.

III. Proscribed prayers: the sure word is the key to accurate spiritual experience (2 Pt 1.15-21)

A. Some key points from the passage

1. Peter is not declaring some made up story in his preaching, he is an eyewitness of glory (15-18)
2. Peter, however, emphasizes that there is something even more sure than his experience on the mountain
 - a. The 'sure word of prophecy' (19)
 - b. The Word of God, a light that shines in a dark place (19)
 - c. The word is sure because of the operation of the Spirit in the inspired writers of Scripture (20-21)

B. Prayers of discipleship will draw you close to God as long as your prayers are proscribed (disciplined, limited) by the sure word of prophecy: the Word of God, the Bible

1. In our emphasis on prayer these last weeks we are not advocating mysticism that takes off on flights of fancy, leading wherever the wind blows
2. We are advocating prayer rooted and grounded in the sure revealed will of God, the Bible

Our men were looking at a diagram concerning discipleship in our meeting yesterday. Part of that diagram had to do with the 'vertical dimension' of our discipleship, *i.e.*, our relationship with God.

- The Word is foundational
- Prayer is essential

Conclusion:

Proposition: Private prayer is a means of discipleship; when you pray, you draw close to heaven and heaven draws close to you.

We really do want to encourage your prayer life. The Lord will use it to teach you, correct you, guide you, even rebuke you.

I hope that this last week your prayers have disciplined you.

I hope these coming weeks, your prayers will even more disciple you.