

## PREEMINENCE

*“Now when all the people were baptized, it came to pass, that Jesus also being baptized, and praying.”* —Luke 3:21

Can you recall your thoughts at the time of your baptism? Scripture tells us Jesus was *praying* when He was baptized. Baptism for Jesus was a crisis hour. It foreshadowed His coming death, burial, and resurrection. When Christ went beneath the water, that “water grave” spoke of the tomb that His body would soon be laid in. Baptism was nothing less than a prophecy of His impending death. Yet, in the midst of this crisis, Jesus was “baptized, and *praying*.” For us baptism is a picture of our death—union with Christ. It shows how we have died to our old life and been resurrected to new life. The gospel is foreshadowed here—a sacrificial death, a temporary burial, and then a physical resurrection! In the midst of this prophecy, Jesus was praying.

I believe one of the chief characteristics of Jesus is that He was a praying man. Preeminently and supremely, Jesus Christ was a praying man. The Lord Jesus was baptized in prayer before He was baptized in water. He was immersed in communion with God long before He was immersed in the Jordan river. His life was saturated in prayer.

Immediately following His immersion, the heavens opened and Jesus was anointed with the Holy Spirit to begin His earthly ministry. “Open heavens” and the Spirit’s anointing are always on the heels of prayer. Often in the Christian experience the heavens seem as brass, walled over. Pointed prayer is the means of breaking through.

There is much that could be said of Jesus. In fact, the whole world could not contain the books if everything that could be said had been written about Him. But before every other thing, behind every other thing, and above every other thing, Jesus was first and foremost a praying man.

Jesus preached great messages, but He prayed first. Jesus healed the multitudes, but He prayed first. Jesus cast out demons, but He prayed first. Jesus did the Father’s will and died on the cross, but He prayed, sweating blood in Gethsemane, first.

Prayer was the natural atmosphere of Christ. He lived in an environment, a climate, an aura of prayer. When astronauts go into outer space, they must take earth's atmosphere with them. If a human went into space without oxygen, he would die.

Similarly, a fish cannot survive out of water. One winter I went fishing with a good friend, and, for a change, we had good luck. We landed several fish that weighed twelve to fourteen pounds apiece. At first, they thrashed madly about. But in a matter of minutes the thrashing was reduced to a twitching of the tale, which soon gave way to stillness. That stillness soon yielded to death. Why? Because fish cannot survive out of their element.

Take a human being out of earth's atmosphere and he will die. Take a fish out of water and it will die. And if you take prayer out of a Christian's life, for all practical purposes, he will die. What's the first thing to go when a man gets away from God? Is it church attendance? No. Tithing? No. The first thing he abandons is prayer. The external activities may disappear in time but first he stops praying—he leaves his “first love.” What's the first thing to return when a man meets God afresh? Is it not his prayer life?

You can't get around prayer. You can't get above prayer. And you can't go too far in prayer. Some complain of others going too far—too deep—in prayer. Our problem is not going too far; most likely, we have not gone far enough!

Prayer is not words we say; prayer is what we are. The psalmist declared, “*I give myself unto prayer*” (Psalm 109:4). The italicized words “*give myself unto*” were added to complete the sentence, but they were not in the original language. The verse could be read, “But I prayer,” or “I am prayer.” Robert Murray McCheyne said, “What a man is alone with God, that is what he is. Nothing more, nothing less.” Prayer is soul speech. It is those heart breathings which issue from deep within.

If the church is going to go forward in our day, she must go forward on her knees. For decades some have busied themselves trying to call America back to God, but God has been calling His people back to prayer!

“My house shall be called the house of prayer” (Matthew 21:13). Jesus' central definition of the church—a house of prayer. Churches should be cathedrals of

prayer and praise. But how many churches do you know of that could be honestly described as houses of prayer? The church today is basically a preaching point and an activity generator. Prayer, if given place at all, is generally given second place. The thing Jesus was most concerned about, we tend to be the least concerned about.

“My house. . . the house of prayer,” was taken from the Old Testament book of Isaiah. It expressed God’s desire for His temple. Today, as believers, our bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit. We are the dwelling place of God. “Ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit” (Ephesians 2:22). God lives in us—our hearts are Christ’s home. Man is the dwelling place of God. Paul prayed, “That Christ may dwell in your hearts” (Ephesians 3:17), or as Wuest put it, “may Christ settle down (feel at home) in your hearts.” Our bodies are the tabernacles (houses) of God. And God’s house is to be a house of prayer.

Christ was baptized in prayer.

He lived in prayer.

He even died in prayer.

Jesus was preeminently a praying man.

This chapter is from *“The Prayer Life of Jesus”* by Harold Vaughan.