

Part 2: Prayer in Our Bones

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Our Advent series has been focusing on the humble reality of Jesus' birth. The scandal of his birth is not that Jesus was born a baby, but that Jesus was born at all—that God would become man. The church has long called this incarnation—that the eternal Son of God would become man—the divine condescension. It's when God condescended to us.

This word is a bit off-putting for us because in our modern language to be condescending is to be, kind of a jerk. If you look at Merriam-Webster's dictionary today the first definition is this: a patronizing attitude or behavior.

When someone speaks in a condescending way to you, we assume that they are taking their position of authority or knowledge and using it to make us feel small and foolish. Think of the boss who is frustrated at the employee who can't follow what he thinks is a basic instruction so he turns to them and says, "Do...you...understand...me?"

No one likes that kind of condescension. That's a condescension which sees someone in need, and lowers one's self only to weaponized the gap between the powerful person and the person in need. We are talked down to in order to be put down.

But that's not what we mean when we speak of Jesus' condescension. In fact if you look back at Webster's original dictionary (1828) you'd find that the primary definition was: "Voluntary descent from rank or claims of dignity; relinquishment of strict right; submission to inferiors in granting requests or performing acts which strict justice does not require. Hence, courtesy."

In the incarnation, Jesus comes down to us. He speaks down to us. But, Jesus' condescension doesn't belittle us. In a stunning inversion it belittles him—as a courtesy to those who he would serve. He doesn't weaponized his rank in coming down to us, but instead he shows his true rank and character by serving us and bearing the cost of it.

Jesus commends this kind of condescending authority to be modeled by his church: **(Matthew 20:25-26), "You know the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. It shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave, even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."**

Jesus says he has come to serve, and to give his life as ransom but he defines this all the more in **Luke 19:10** when he says, **"For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."**

Jesus' mission on earth was a courtesy of condescending service. But we also see the quality of service—it was redemptive. He came to seek and to save the lost—he came to seek and save sinners ransoming them by the blood of his cross.

This is why the passage we just read today is important. Notice again what Mark says, **(Mark 1:35-38)**, "And rising very early in the morning, while it was still dark, he departed and went out to a desolate place, and there he prayed. And Simon and those who were with him searched for him, and they found him and said, 'Everyone is looking for you.' And he said to them, 'Let us go on to the next towns, that I may preach there also, for that is why I came out.'"

Today we are going to talk about the prayer life of Jesus. Now, you might say, "that seems a bit boring, of course Jesus prayed, he's Jesus." But prayer, as we will see, is part of his condescending service to seek and save the lost. If Jesus were to humble himself and seek us, he also had to humble himself to a unique seeking of the Father through prayer.

This passage in Mark gives us Jesus' messianic purpose—he's going to preach the gospel. But central to that mission was Jesus' prayer life. While everyone was seeking Jesus, Jesus was seeking the Father in prayer. This was not an accessory to his mission. It was essential to it. What we are going to discover together today is that **A praying Jesus reminds us of what was always his, and what by grace is now ours.**

As we look at this and other this morning we will see that Jesus' prayer life reveals three things: **An Infinite Distance, A Reliant Representative,** and lastly **A Relational Restoration.**

First, let's examine the **infinite distance** Jesus' prayer shows us. The fact that Jesus had to pray, was in itself a jarring experience compared to what he was used to for all eternity.

I consider myself to be a fairly adaptable individual. But there's one thing that I've come to realize that I'll never be able to overcome. If my wife changes which drawer includes what in our kitchen, I'll never emotionally recover.

Just this week, I myself willingly changed where I put some things in the kitchen, and there has yet to be a day where I am not frustrated. I'm frustrated because I know I still have access to all these things, but they are in a different spot. They're not where they used to be.

This is a very trivial example of what Jesus prayer life would have been in relationship to the Trinity. The author of Hebrews quotes Psalm 8 in regards to Jesus' incarnation saying, "But we see him who for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely Jesus..." **(Hebrews 2:9).**

Angels being spirit, come and go freely between heaven and earth. But Jesus, for the first time in eternity was bound by his humanity in one place, at one time, for as long as his mission required.

In eternity, he existed in the direct and immediate fellowship of the Father and the Spirit. But for a little while, that immediacy and proximity was stretched. In heaven the Son never needed to pray—he just spoke. But in human form—to speak he had to pray.

Hebrews 5:7 says, "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."

Jesus' prayer life was unique to "the days of his flesh." Why? Because the drawers were moved. It's not that he was any less God. It's not that the Son was any less connected to the Father or filled with the Spirit. It was just the access to those things wasn't as close, or as natural, as it used to be. In Triune glory

in heaven, there was never a moment where Jesus was not immediately, actively, and intimately in the presence of the Father or the Spirit. There was in a sense not only a relational intimacy, but also a geographic one.

But when he took on flesh, though the relational intimacy remained, the geography of the Trinity was stretched. Mark highlights that distance for us in his grammar of **vs. 35**. He rose while it was early. He departed while it was still dark. He went to a desolate place. And then finally, he prayed.

The distance from one end of the kitchen to the other was infinite compared to what it used to be. The Puritan, Thomas Watson once said that in praise we act like angels, but in prayer we act like men. Jesus' prayer life was part of his condescension and identification with humanity. He acted like a man, and prayed to the Father because his humanity put him at distance from the immediate nearness of glory.

Every time Jesus prayed, it was his humble willingness to find another drawer. For any of us, this would have been more than frustrating—it would have been devastating. We often view the Triune God as a tool or a divine accountant. But Jesus shows us that the Trinity was the center of joy itself. To be directly removed from it by space, was to have a constant ache of what was always at a distance.

If you've ever read love letters between two people, you've seen this kind of ache. The French Emperor, Napoleon Bonaparte was a man of great passion for his beloved. He wrote countless letters to his future wife Josephine while separated on the battlefield. They drip with the deep pain of distance.

Writing in 1814 he says, "Sleep consoles me; it places me by your side, I clasp you in my arms. But on waking, alas! I find myself three hundred leagues from you." One night he fell asleep staring at her portrait and rose to write her the next morning: "Your portrait...has left my senses in turmoil...my soul aches with sorrow...Ah! It was last night that I fully realized how false an image of you your portrait gives."

When he talks about the pain of her portrait, and the false perception it provides, he doesn't mean the portrait is itself false. It means it's just not fully true. For us, Josephine's portrait would have been the full truth from our perspective. We know her no other way. But for Napoleon he knew her portrait to a flatten presentation of what he knew in depth, in intimacy and in experience.

Have you ever looked at a portrait of a friend who has moved, a love one stationed overseas, or held the wedding ring of a spouse who has passed? You feel nearness, but what you mostly feel is the pain of what is at a distance. Jesus, as the Son of God, was never fully separated relationally from the Trinity, but his prayer life shows the necessary ache of gazing at the Trinity only as a portrait. Always there, but never fully present.

What interesting is that no one records more of Jesus' prayer life than John in his gospel. But John never uses the Greek verb for prayer. You know what he says instead when he signals to us that Jesus prayed? "He lifted up his eyes." Prayer for Jesus was a divine longing for what was far from him. Even though it was only for a little while, even though it wasn't a full separation—the center of his soul and affection was no longer at eye level.

He had to relate to the Trinity in a uniquely human way. For us, prayer is a restoration that we never knew we lost. But for Jesus prayer was a constant reminder of the incarnation's cost. It cost him a great distance.

But he did this willingly because Jesus came to seek and save the lost. The distance Jesus willingly walked was huge. Infinite. But the distance you and I have from God is even more infinite (if it were possible). Jesus in the flesh took on the distance of what God created—humanity. But we in our sin took on the distance of what God hated—sinful depravity.

Jesus, being perfectly sinless, eagerly sought the Father because of the effect of space. How much more ought we to seek the Father because in addition to space we have the problem of sin. We are not only relationally separated, we are morally separated. Our chasm is greater, therefore our need greater. But the problem of human history is that we, despite such a great need, did not seek God.

This is our second point this morning: Jesus' prayer life shows us **A Reliant Representative**.

You'll notice how easy it was for Jesus to slip out in our Mark passage. No one went with him. No one else seemed to be as interested. We needed Jesus to pray, because at the core of humanity's sin was a failure to pray. This was, in many ways, the sin of our first parents in the garden.

Now you might say, "What does eating the fruit in the garden have to do with prayer?" That's a good question. But at its core prayer is simply an appeal to God's transcendent power and God's immanent presence. We pray because God is powerful and greater than us, and yet we pray because God has desired to be present and concerned with us.

When Adam and Eve ate the fruit, they didn't appeal to God's power which transcended all their problems. They didn't fight back by appealing to the God who had already given them all things. They also didn't fight back by running to the relational intimacy of the God who had already made a pattern of walking in the garden with them.

The serpent came to them when God was seemingly absent as if to say, "See, he's not always close." He tempted them with the ability to be like God as if to say, "You can be just as powerful as him." It was not Adam's relationship to the fruit which was assaulted, but his relationship to God.

They refused to live in reliance and community with the God who was always present and ever powerful. It was God's garden. He was present, he was powerful. If he would have been cried out to, he would have taken a hoe to the head of that serpent like a good Father. God didn't fail, they failed.

They didn't run to him. They didn't cry out to him. And now that powerful and present God who desired to bless, was now called to take a stand against the sinner. By his power, and because of his power, they were removed from his presence so that they might be saved by crying out and coming back.

But in this new sinful world, the first thing that cried out to God was the blood of Abel after he was murdered by his brother. It wasn't until God's people were enslaved in Egypt that the whole nation finally cried out to God for help. And he answered, he heard their cries and delivered them.

But the rest of the story of Israel shows how quickly they forgot God, just like Adam. But when Solomon finally built the temple he prayed a prophetic prayer. As God's presence filled the temple and once more dwelled among his people he prayed. He assumes that Israel is going to mess up again, but he asked God that if they turned and prayed towards God's presence in the temple, that he would hear them in heaven and listen, and forgive.

He gives eight hypotheticals in his prayer and the summary is this: if your people are alone, if they are sinful, if they are in trouble, if even the nations seek you and cry out to you, hear them and answer. Eight times he asks God to "hear in heaven," the prayers of his people.

In other words, Solomon was asking God to be God. God had already promised in Deuteronomy that if his people would turn to him, if they would seek him, he would be found and he would act. Look at how the Psalmist talks of this **Psalm 81:4-10**.

God says, "Just open your mouth you needy people and I will fill it! Pray to me and I will answer! I will save you from your sins and bring you into my new mercy every morning!"

The problem of Israel's history, and the problem of our own heart is not that God doesn't answer. The problem is that sin makes us mute to even ask. As Paul quotes Isaiah in Romans 3:11, "No one seeks for God."

We ask Siri, we ask Redditt, we ask our Senators and human saviors to help us. But on our own we do not seek God. So what does God do? Out of his great love for us, out of his desire to serve us, he comes to seek us by sending Jesus to be the new man who always sought God.

Jesus came as a true man. He came with all the weaknesses and issues of reliance that we ourselves had baked into our flesh and bones. But he never lost sight of his need for constant communion with God. If anyone would have had a pass to not pray, wouldn't it be the man who is God? Wouldn't it be Jesus? If anyone were to be self-sufficient and rightfully so, wouldn't it have been him?

But of all the people and prayers we read of in the New Testament, we find no one praying more than Jesus. Not even in all the narratives of Acts do we find someone who prayed more.

Jesus did all this work to pray not only because he needed it in the flesh but because we needed it! He subjected himself to the weakness of human prayer because we were too weak to pray. He prayed not only for us, but as us. He relied fully and sinlessly because we never could.

He offered up prayers in the days of his flesh, early in the morning, while it was still dark, alone and in desolate places, with loud cries and tears to him who was able to save him from death—because we needed to be saved from death—death in sin which put us forever at a distance.

And Jesus, surrendered himself not only to our distance—but to our death so that Solomon's prayer might be answered. Only in Jesus, we can with confidence cry out to God and say, "hear in heaven and forgive," "hear in heaven, and maintain our cause."

God will hear. Do you know why? Notice the prophetic prayer of Solomon in **1 Kings 8:32**, "then hear in heaven and act and judge your servants, condemning the guilty by bringing his conduct on his own head, and vindicating the righteous by rewarding him according to his righteousness."

Brothers and sisters we can pray that prayer because it was poured out on Jesus. Because Jesus was faithful to pray, our guilt can be poured out on his head. Because Jesus was faithful to rely on the Father, we are declared righteous not according to our righteousness but according to his. He sought and saved us by seeking God faithfully on our behalf.

Jesus didn't yet win us back to the garden, but on the cross he has won us back to walking with God in the desert.

This is our last point today and it's really a profound point of application: In Jesus' prayer life we see **A Relational Restoration**.

So in the work of the cross, we are declared to be justified. We are declared innocent because Jesus has taken our guilt. But let's not forget that what Jesus came to do was not merely to get us back into the garden by removing our sin, but his mission was to restore us to the God of the garden.

Do you remember what the disciples said when they found Jesus? "Everyone is looking for you." These people were seeking Jesus because they wanted healing. But Jesus' prayer life shows us something more. Why can everyone seek Jesus? Why should we seek Jesus? Because Jesus sought the Father. It's his relationship with the Father that makes him the savior we need.

Jesus came and faithfully relied on the Father so that in him we can be restored in the same way back to the Father. Adam and his self-sufficiency brought death and distance, Jesus and his faithful obedience bridged the gap. He brings us not only back, he brings us back better.

Jesus always prayed by calling God his Father. The significance of this is lost on us, but it's part of why the Jews wanted to kill him. No man can pray like that. One Ancient Near Eastern scholar noted the scandal of Jesus praying to God as "My Father," **"To date nobody has produced one single instance in Palestinian Judaism where God is addressed as 'my Father' by an individual person. ... Nowhere in the literature of the prayers of ancient Judaism... is this invocation of God as Abba to be found, neither in the liturgical nor in the informal prayers."**

What Jesus had with the Father, was worthy how he sought him out. Many of you get up early to go hunting, to begin baking, to go for a run, or to watch some soccer game. Why? Because it was worth it. Jesus sought to Father through the Spirit, early and often in drastic ways because it was worth it.

He knew the warmth, he knew the wonder, he knew the intimacy—an intimacy so scandalous that it put him on the cross when he spoke of it. While it's already scandalous that Jesus had to pray in order to enjoy his unique relationship to the Father—it's even more scandalous to realize he invites those who caused that relational distance into the full restoration of it! Listen to Jesus prayer in **John 17:20-24**.

Jesus gives us a "plus one" for all eternity back into the Father's pleasure. He doesn't have to convince the Father to listen, he is the proof that the Father has listened. The author of Hebrews tells us that Jesus lives even today to make intercession for us before God. He speaks on our behalf. But Jesus makes intercession endlessly for us because Jesus is the Father's intercession for us.

Calvin says, **"to relieve us at once from fear and shame, with which all must feel oppressed, [the Father] has given us his son, Jesus Christ our Lord, to be our Advocate and Mediator, that under his guidance we may approach securely."**

Jesus is proof that relational restoration is possible. He's proof that your life really is painful, and hard, and that sin is dangerous, and that God cares for you. Prayer is really the work of the incarnation. In the

incarnation, God took on the created humanity so that by the work of Christ on the cross, humanity could take on communion with God.

The theologian P.T. Forsyth says it this way, **"Prayer, as it is spoken, follows the principle of the incarnation, only with the descending movement reversed. God became man in his son's outgoing that man might [be restored to the] divine; and prayer is in the train of the son's return to the Father. It is the true response, and tribute, and trophy to Christ's humiliation. Man rises to be a co-worker with God in the highest sense."**

Martin Luther once said, **"To be a Christian without prayer is no more possible than to be alive without breathing."**

Jesus' prayer life reveals that we have storehouses of intimate relationship available to us just as Jesus himself used in the flesh. Because Jesus, as a man, sought the Father through the Spirit—so too can we. This is not the burden of the Christian life, it's the blessing of it. Why would we neglect such a great relationship?

What does it look like to reverse the curse? It looks like crying out to the Father, in the Spirit, in the name of the Son. You want to see a miracle, pray. You want to receive a miracle, pray. You want to live every day in light of that miracle pray. Lame men are healed to walk. Blind receive sight to see. Dead are given life to live. And Christians are saved to commune with God in the power of prayer through Jesus Christ.

When we pray we are standing on the work of the incarnation. When we pray we are enjoying the work of the Spirit. When we pray we are communing with the Father who desires that we bring him all of our needs, our weaknesses and our sins. Because of the Son we know he will always hear us, even when we come torn and tattered. Because of our sin, Jesus took on a distance he never had so that we who were at a distance can enjoy what was never ours.