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What Now? / Romans 12:12; James 5:16–18; 1 Thessalonians 5:16–18

Focus on the James passage with putting in the others?

The year was 27 AD. Jesus was baptized in the Jordan River. The account as told in Luke 3:21–23 says “Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.”

Not long after Jesus was tempted in the desert, and as described in Matthew 4:1–2 “Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. He fasted forty days and forty nights.”

Later that same year as described in Mark 1, Jesus healed Simon’s mother-in-law. It was that evening that people brought many who were sick and demon-possessed to Jesus to heal. “The whole city was gathered around the door. And he cured many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons; and he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him. In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed.”

In 28 AD, Jesus chose his twelve disciples, described in Luke 6:12–13, “Those days he went out to the mountain to pray; and he spent the night in prayer to God. And when day came, he called his disciples and chose twelve of them, whom he also named apostles.”

Shortly there after he preached the Sermon on the Mount in Capernaum, where he taught the people to pray.

As we know, Jesus performed many miracles. It was the spring of 29 AD when he fed the 5000. Matthew describes that when he took the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves, before giving them to the disciples to give to the crowd. He then went to a mountainside by himself to pray, before meeting up with the disciples of which he then performed another miracle of walking on water.

Sometime after this, was the transfiguration as described in Luke 9:28–29 when “Jesus took with him Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain to pray. And while he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white.”

Jesus raised his friend, Lazarus, from the grave. As described in John’s gospel, the stone was rolled away, Jesus looked up and said, John 11:41–42 “Father, I thank you for having heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here,

so that they may believe that you sent me,” at which point Lazarus arose.

If we look closer to his crucifixion, when he was in Gethsemane, Jesus went with his disciples and said to them in Matthew “Sit here while I go over there and pray, My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet not what I want but what you want.” When Jesus was on the cross it is recorded in Luke 23:34 Jesus saying, “Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing,” and in Mark 15:34 “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” and in Luke 23:46 “Father, into your hands I commend my spirit.” before he breathed his last. The last one I want to point out is after his resurrection at which Jesus is with his disciples and as described in Luke 24:30–31 “When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight.”

What did you notice throughout the life and ministry of Jesus from these examples, described throughout all four gospels?

As you read about Jesus throughout the gospels, you will notice that the stories are not told in exactly the same way, or in exactly the same order, each for their own reason as each Gospel writer focuses on something different about Jesus. While there few events found in all four gospels, but

there is something else planted all throughout the stories as just read.

As mentioned last week, these four weeks will be a series with a final unveiling on June 8th as our mission statement on our One Day/Anniversary service for this year. It's hard to explain it all now, but I hope by the end you will see where God has been leading me since September, and I believe us as a church, since I started here as pastor. I'm going to be spelling out an acronym as our mission statement.

Last week I started with the letter L, which stood for learning and living the gospel. Today's letter is O. Obedience through prayer. All throughout Jesus' life he prayed, demonstrating it's power and connection with the Father.

Jesus prayed at his baptism, to begin His ministry in communion with the Father, teaching us to start with God, to pray before new beginnings. He fasted and prayed for 40 days before facing temptation in the desert for spiritual strength and focus before a major challenge demonstrating that prayer prepares us for trials and temptations. Jesus prayed before he chose his 12 disciples to seek the Father's guidance in making big decisions, teaching us to bring major choices to God in prayer. Jesus taught his followers how to pray, as heard in the Sermon on the Mount. After long days of ministry, healing many, he prayed to recharge

spiritually after serving others showing us that we need quiet time with God to stay refreshed. Before large miracles or big moments such as feeding the 5000 and raising Lazarus he prayed to show dependence on the Father and reveal God's power teaching us that miracles flow from prayerful trust in God. He prayed on the mountain during the transfiguration to commune deeply with God and be renewed in His mission, demonstrating that prayer transforms us and connects us to God's glory. He prayed in Gethsemane before the cross to surrender to God's will in His darkest hour. We learn from this that in pain and fear, we can pour our hearts honestly to God. And that even in agony, on the cross, Jesus turned to the Father in prayer. We can pray in suffering, even when we feel abandoned. After his resurrection, Jesus blessed and broke bread with the disciples to reveal Himself and restore fellowship, teaching us that prayer opens eyes to who Jesus is. Jesus showed us how different prayer can look and sound. He demonstrated bringing everything to the Father in prayer, every single type of situation.

Prayer has power. Prayer isn't just us talking to God when we need something—it's a way of walking with Him. Obedience doesn't come from trying harder; it comes from staying close to the heart of God. When we pray, we're not just asking—we're listening, surrendering, trusting. Prayer keeps us aligned with His will.

As Eugene Peterson wrote, “Prayers are tools, but with this clarification: prayers are not tools for doing or getting, but for being and becoming. In our largely externalized culture, we are urgently presented with tools that enable us to do things (a machine, for instance, to clean the carpet) and to get things (a computer, for instance, to get information). We are also well trained in their use. We are not so readily offered tools that enable our being and becoming human....at the center of the whole enterprise of being human prayers are the primary technology. Prayers are tools that God uses to work his will in our bodies and souls. Prayers are tools that we use to collaborate in his work with us.”

This past winter we spent a 9 week series on the Lord’s Prayer and this summer we’re doing a series called Psalms of the Summer, the Psalms, labelled by Peterson as “God’s gift to train us in prayer that is comprehensive and honest.”

When you pray, do you ever wonder what to say?

God has given us both the Psalms and the Lord’s Prayer as tools to help us talk to Him - two very different, but powerful gifts. The Psalms represent like a tool box - many tools for different situations. The Lord’s Prayer is like a Swiss Army knife, a multi-tool, compact, covers all the basics. In life, sometimes, we need a whole toolbox to fix what’s going on in our heart. That’s like the Psalms - praise, lament, joy, grief, all found in the Psalms, many tools for

different situations. But sometimes we need one solid tool that can handle anything; The Lord's Prayer.

So often, people are scared of prayer, they think they don't have the right words, afraid when they stutter, they can't pray in front of others, when God hears anything we whisper, shout, sing or say. Prayer is not about saying perfect words - it's about bringing your heart to God, and in how you listen and respond in obedience.

There have been times when I have prayed to God inbetween crying sob fits that I don't know what to say or am struggling to speak so instead I cry to God, only being able to muster God I need you, and there have been times I've prayed with so much joy because of a miracle that has occurred, and anything in between. I have realized that God is big enough for our raw emotions and holy enough for our reverence. God handles everything and anything. Prayer is also about getting into the quiet and listening. What is God saying to you? What is he asking of you? How are you responding to His will for your life?

Do you ever wonder what happens when you pray? In Daniel 9, Daniel prays to the Lord, at which point it says in Daniel 9:21-23 "while I [Daniel] was speaking in prayer, the man Gabriel, whom I had seen before in a vision, came to me in swift flight at the time of the evening sacrifice. He came and said to me, "Daniel, I have now come out to give you wisdom and understanding. At the beginning of your

supplications a word went out, and I have come to declare it, for you are greatly beloved.”

Think of this. A word went out. The very moment you began to pray. There is no backlog of prayers. No waiting for response. You pray. He acts. So why does it seem that we must persevere in prayer? A bit later in Daniel we may have an answer:

Daniel 10:12–13 “He said to me, “Do not fear, Daniel, for from the first day that you set your mind to gain understanding and to humble yourself before your God, your words have been heard, and I have come because of your words. But the prince of the kingdom of Persia opposed me twenty-one days. So Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, and I left him there with the prince of the kingdom of Persia,”

The resistance you feel is real. Persevering in prayer is important because a battle of epic proportions may be occurring in the unseen world on your behalf. Your prayer is heard. It is not for nothing. Keep praying, keep listening, you have no idea what God is doing in the background. He always knows best.

I’m going to end with a few everyday, individual stories of the affect of prayer:

- It started like any ordinary trip to Target. I finished shopping and headed to the checkout lane. A mom and

her son walked up behind me. He was proudly toting his new Nerf toy in one hand and gripping a handful of gift cards in the other. His mom explained it was her son's birthday. He had received four gift cards and decided to spend them all on this one toy. His face lit up when his mom shared his birthday story. As his eyes gazed into mine, God moved my heart and I asked his mom if I could treat her son to the toy so he could save his gift cards for another day. His mom said yes, and a huge grin spread across his face. Tears leaked from his mama's eyes as I shared how I was teaching a Bible study on Jesus' love for us and asking God for opportunities to love other people. As I reached the door, her son told me that instead of spending all his gift cards on another toy for himself, he decided to give one away. I'm more thankful that God answered my prayer because somewhere in our city another little boy on another ordinary day would receive an extraordinary gift of love through a tender-hearted boy.

- For someone else, A few years ago, I was walking with my friend and we were chatting about my childhood. I don't remember how it came up, but I told her we left the mission in Nepal and flew to Holland because I had been diagnosed with leukemia. Only somewhere between leaving Nepal and being treated for leukemia, my tests came back with unusual results and my blood counts

had begun normalizing. Why they didn't say I was healed, they all scratched their heads and wondered if I had been misdiagnosed the whole time because that doesn't happen. "God healed you," my friend replied. Until that time I had never claimed that God healed me. I always explained it away in vague terms. I was diagnosed, they said I wasn't doing well, and prepared my parents for the possible loss of their child and then I was getting better and nothing had been done but prayer.

- For another individual: "I want you to do what she says." I heard the words in my heart as I prepared to go see a new doctor about several health issues. I felt reassurance that morning in my quiet time with the Lord when He impressed upon me to follow the doctor's orders when I received them. I had new hope that He was going to use her to help me heal and I was grateful. Soon I was sitting in the doctor's office where she handed me a list of foods that she wanted me no longer to consume. The list was long, and most of my favorite things were on there. I left her office disappointed, and under my breath I stated, "I'm not doing that!" No sooner had the last word escaped my lips when I remembered the instructions I received a couple of hours prior. God knew I would resist. He wanted me to do what she said, and He had told me so before she had handed me the list condemning me to

a diet of cardboard. I battled intensely with submitting to God's instructions for my diet. It wasn't until I finally surrendered and chose to be obedient that I realized how much God was for me and His love was setting boundaries for me to help me heal. God knew the best way for me to be made well was to do some hard things I did not want to do.

- And the last story, I have told you much of my story over the last number of years, so I won't relay it in details, but through prayer and listening to God is how I started helping out with VBS one summer, which led to becoming the children and youth coordinator, to then begin my degree at Acadia Divinity College. Then in a moment of absolute despair when things changed so quickly without understanding what was going on, as I cried out to God in prayer, I heard the voice of God, to then feel the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, as Paul wrote in Philippians. The passage read in Philippians means a lot to mean because of one special individual in my life. I was sitting with them when they asked me to read this passage, of which I did and then I prayed with and for them. I saw the peace that they felt as this passage was read, even while being sick, their faith was so strong and they knew to bring everything to God in prayer. I have since read that passage and prayed with an individual as they were

nearing the time to leave this world to be with Jesus. I am so thankful to God for his answers to prayer, for from that I have the pleasure of pastoring with you and I feel absolutely blessed each day for this opportunity.

“Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” Thanks be to God.