



MINISTRIES

A Ministry of the Athens Universal Life Church
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TITLE: People of Prayer—People of Blessing

SERMON IN A SENTENCE: Jesus received the blessing of Spirit and word while at prayer after his baptism, modeling for us that prayer is one of God's vehicles for blessing.

SCRIPTURE: Luke 3:15-17, 21-22

Hello Friends! I am Doctor Rob White with the A U L C Ministries with our message this week.

I am happy that you can take a few minutes out of your busy week to be with us this week!

Growing up, most of us dream of becoming rich and famous. Maybe becoming a movie star or President of the United States. Maybe an astronaut or even a police officer or firefighter.

We think that being rich and famous will take care of all of our wants and needs and we would never have to worry ever again!

Well, as we see in our scripture text today, being famous isn't all it's cracked up to be! We are looking at John the Baptist again this week and let's go to our Bibles to the Gospel of Luke, chapter 3, verses fifteen to seventeen and twenty one and twenty two.

Starting at verse fifteen:

15 Now the people were waiting expectantly, and all of them were debating in their minds whether John might be the Messiah.

16 John answered them all, "I baptize you with water, but One is coming who is more powerful than I. I am not worthy to untie the strap of His sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.
17 His winnowing shovel is in His hand to clear His threshing floor and gather the wheat into His barn, but the chaff He will burn up with a fire that never goes out."

21 When all the people were baptized, Jesus also was baptized. As He was praying, heaven opened,
22 and the Holy Spirit descended on Him in a physical appearance like a dove. And a voice came from heaven:

You are My beloved Son.
I take delight in You!

May the Lord add His Blessing on the reading of His Word!

Now, can you imagine being too famous? Comedian Bill Murray, who became famous for his roles in such movies as Caddyshack and Ghostbusters, says:

"Nothing can prepare you for being famous.
It's completely different from the way anybody's parents raise them.
You think it will be a life of leisure—
and there are moments of riding in limos
and having somebody carry your bag—
but it's also a 24-hour-a-day job.
To people who want to be rich and famous,
I'd say, 'Get rich first and see if that doesn't cover it.'"

John the Baptist was famous. He was a famous preacher—like Billy Graham or the Pope. He didn't mind the attention that came with the job. He was preaching in the wilderness—the equivalent of a big-time tent meeting—and people were coming from everywhere to hear him. He was telling them to repent and to get right with God—and they were responding by the thousands. So far, so good!

The problem wasn't that he was famous. It was that he was TOO famous! People were saying, "Wow! He must be the messiah!" John was NOT the messiah—was called only to get people ready for the messiah. For people to believe that he was the messiah was wrong—like having people mistake the preacher for God! No preacher can afford to let people make that kind of mistake.

And so John said, "NO! You have it wrong! I am NOT the messiah! Not even close! Let me explain the difference. The one who is coming is so great that I am not worthy even to tie his shoes. I just baptize you with water. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire."

In other words, "You ain't seen nuthin' yet! The one who is coming is not only greater—he is altogether different. I am like a flashlight—he is like the 4th of July! I am like the one who hands out donuts at a disaster—he is like the one who rushes into burning buildings to pull people to safety! I am just POINTING the way—He IS The Way!"

After that story, we have Luke's account of Jesus' baptism. He is so concerned to subordinate John to Jesus that he doesn't even tell us that John baptized Jesus. He says only that Jesus was baptized. Then he tells us that heaven was opened and the Holy Spirit descended on Jesus in bodily form like a dove—

and a voice from heaven said, "You are my beloved Son. In you I am well pleased" (verse 22 of our scripture text today).

Note that the Spirit and the voice did not come during Jesus' baptism, but afterwards—when Jesus was praying. Prayer was so important to Jesus! Luke often pictures him at prayer, but only occasionally tells us what he prayed about:

- We know that he prayed for his disciples (as we see in Luke 22:32—and also in John seventeen).
- Just before his death, he prayed that, if the Father were willing, this cup might pass from him—in other words, he prayed that he might escape death—but only if the Father was willing. He concluded his prayer by saying, **"Not my will, but yours, be done"** (as we see in Luke 22:42).
- He prayed even for his enemies. **"Father, forgive them, for they don't know what they are doing"** (as we see in Luke 23:34).
- As he died, he prayed, **"Father, into your hands I commit my spirit"** (and again in Luke 23:46).

But we don't know what he prayed after his baptism. We might think of Jesus' baptism as his ordination, so perhaps he was praying to be equal to the great task before him. Perhaps he was praying for vision to lead rightly—for strength to withstand temptation—for disciples who would be faithful—for success in his role as savior.

But, whatever the content of his prayer, it was during his prayer that heaven opened—and the Spirit descended on him—and the voice from heaven said, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

In other words, while Jesus was at prayer, he received the blessing. That is instructive. Sometimes we fail to appreciate the power of prayer. Sometimes when faced with a difficult problem, we say, "Well, all we can do is to pray"—as if hope has been exhausted, and we are left only with pitiful prayer. We would do better to say hopefully, "Well, we can pray"—knowing that, in prayer, we connect ourselves to God—to God's power—to possibilities beyond our imagining.

Every day, God answers prayers in astounding ways. Every day, God blesses people who have taken time to pray. That doesn't mean that God answers every prayer as we ask, but it does mean that prayer is a great power—not a pitiful last resort.

But it is fair to ask why Jesus prayed. After all, didn't he come from heaven? Couldn't he somehow connect with the Father intuitively? Wasn't he always connected to the Father?

I believe that Jesus was always connected, in some sense, with the Father. But his prayer life shows us that he considered prayer to be something more than handing a wish-list to the Father. When he prayed, he wasn't like a college student writing home for money. He was a son coming home to visit—to sit down and talk—to further an important relationship—to gain strength—to keep on the right path.

Haven't you experienced a relationship like that at some point in your life? It might have been with your mother instead of your father—or with your husband or wife—or with a trusted friend. The important point is that you could talk with that person and come away strengthened—come away with truer direction. You didn't have to worry about their leading you astray. You didn't have to worry about

their hidden agenda. You knew them to be reliable and trustworthy. It isn't easy to find such a person, so they are as precious as a rare gem—more precious really. A precious gem cannot guide you through a tough decision, but a trustworthy friend can.

I believe that Jesus had a relationship like that with his heavenly Father, and it helped him to do the right thing. We often talk about the sinless Jesus as if sinlessness was easy for him. I don't think that it was. If his sinlessness were easy, he would not have been tempted like we are tempted—because our temptations are not easy. The scriptures tell us that Jesus was, indeed, tempted like we are (as we see in Hebrews 4:15), so I believe that his ability to stay true depended, at least in part, on his strong prayer life.

If prayer was important to Jesus—if prayer was the source of his strength and true direction—doesn't it make sense to believe that we need prayer for strength and true direction as well?

- If it was while Jesus was praying that heaven opened and the Spirit descended on him, doesn't that suggest that our prayers are important to the Spirit?
- If it was during prayer that Jesus heard the Father's voice saying, "You are my Son, the beloved; with you I am well pleased," wouldn't it seem wise for us to spend more time in prayer—and is listening for the Father's voice?

Some years ago, Barbara Brown Taylor, Episcopal priest and prolific author, wrote an article in which she told of her granddaughter Madeline's experience of —the death of a friend—her parents' divorce.

Things came to a head on Madeline's birthday, when it was time for her to blow out the candles. Her grandfather told her to make a wish, and she balked. She had already wished for her friend to live, and the friend died. She wished for her parents to get back together, but knew that they wouldn't. Why bother? Nobody had much of an answer. I can just imagine how quiet it got around that birthday table.

But it did set Barbara to thinking. The subject had been wishes rather than prayer, but the two aren't that far apart—at least in the mind of a child. Barbara began to consider how to encourage Madeline to pray, even though she could not always expect her prayers to be answered as asked. After a good deal of thought, she wrote this article. I think that you will find it helpful. She said:

"What I want Madeline to know is that the best thing about prayer
is the relationship itself.
Whether or not she gets what she asks for,
I want her to keep asking.
I want her to pester God the same way she pesters her mother,
thinking of 12 different ways to plead her case.
I want her to long for God the same way she longs for her father,
holding fast to him even when his chair is empty."

She concluded the article this way:

"One day, when Madeline asks me outright whether prayer really works,
I am going to say, 'Oh, sweetie, of course it does.'
It keeps our hearts chasing after God's heart.
It's how we bother God,

and how God bothers us back.
There's nothing that works any better than that."

After Jesus was baptized—while he was praying—heaven opened and the Holy Spirit descended on him like a dove—and a voice from heaven said, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.

Prayer is one of God's vehicles for blessing. Let us be a people of prayer—so that we might also be a people of blessing.

That's our Lord's message for this Lord's Day and I hope you got a blessing out of it!

Go out this week and be a blessing and be blessed! For the more you are a blessing, the more you will be blessed!

Thank you all for watching and listening and we will see you all next week!

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