

**In the Days of His Flesh: The Son and Supplication**  
**Hebrews 5:7**  
**December 10, 2023**

In high school I was given a book on Christian leadership that covered a number of topics. The chapter on prayer began with a quote, “If I wished to humble anyone, I should question him about his prayers. I know nothing to compare with this topic for its sorrowful self–confessions.” After that quote, the chapter did what a number of books on prayer do, that is, give the prayer life stats of saints throughout history. It began with a man named Samuel Chadwick, describing the hour he spent before breakfast in prayer. Then it moved to a quote from Luther, describing his next day’s plans: “Work, work from early till late. In fact, I have so much to do that I shall spend the first three hours in prayer.”<sup>1</sup> Then the author writes, “If Luther was busy, and prayed, so can we.”<sup>2</sup>

I’m guessing you can hear a little subtext in that opening paragraph. But, let me be clear, I’m *not* implying that considering the example of others is wrong. In fact, at times I’ve been rightly challenged by this kind of teaching. We *need* models. However, *other* times I’ve found that attempts to motivate prayer through the stats of saints to be a bit debilitating. “Don’t forget, young Christian: Wesley awoke at 4 a.m. and prayed for 2 hours.<sup>3</sup> You can too!”

Sometimes the higher the number of hours the more unattainable any of it seems. Maybe the more hours noted, the more guilt is heaped.

Today we’re going to talk about the prayer life of Jesus of Nazareth. I don’t have stats, *per se*, but we do have something of a summary in Hebrews 5:7. And my hope is to convince you by the end that Luther, Chadwick, and Wesley’s prayer life *combined* doesn’t come close to His.

However, to convince you of that is not to aim at guilt, but at grace.

So, we’ll move from briefly considering *our* prayer life, to considering *His* in much detail, before we finally move back to ours. The aim is that in considering Him—what He’s done, praying in the flesh, praying in our place—that we might be encouraged to draw near all the more. Note first,

### 1. The Son that Prays

Verse 7 begins: **In the days of His flesh, He offered up both prayers and supplications.**

As mentioned last week, the phrase “days of His flesh” isn’t *only* describing a particular chapter or season of Jesus’s life. Instead, it encompasses the entirety of His life, from childhood to His years of ministry all the way to His death.<sup>4</sup> But there’s something here I didn’t mention last week, that is, the term “flesh.” When you read the book of Romans, “flesh” is a bad word. We don’t want to do something in, or think according to, the “flesh.”

But “flesh” isn’t always pejorative in the Scriptures.<sup>5</sup> It can’t be. The Word became “flesh” (John 1:14).

This time of year, especially, we use the term “incarnation” to describe this “becoming flesh.” But do you know what “incarnation” means? *Carne* is Latin for flesh or, even, meat. So, you go to the store, and you can either buy chili or you can buy chili con carne. *Con Carne* means “with meat.” So, to break “incarnation” apart in Latin: “in” means “in”; “carne” means “flesh.”

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<sup>1</sup> Though I can’t seem to find this quote in any primary source.

<sup>2</sup> J. Oswald Sanders, *Spiritual Leadership*, 86.

<sup>3</sup> E. M. Bounds, *Power Through Prayer*, 53.

<sup>4</sup> Peter O’Brien, *God Has Spoken in His Son*, NSBT, 67; Gareth Cockerill, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, NICNT, 242.

<sup>5</sup> Paul Ellingworth, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, NIGTC, 287.

We're not Gnostics—heretics, mind you—believing that it's *only* the spiritual that's spiritual. That which is physical isn't evil in essence *merely* because it's physical. It *can't* be, because Jesus clothed Himself with humanity, put on flesh, and was born in the likeness of man (Phil. 2).

So, again, thinking in terms of addition, not subtraction—God *plus* man—when we talk about His prayer life, it's imperative that we think of what He's done *as* what He's done in the flesh. If not, we'll miss some of the grace.

With that in mind, what did He do **in the days of His flesh**? He **offered up both prayers and supplications**. Is there a major distinction between the two terms? Not necessarily. The two similar terms instead seem to intensify what is being said.<sup>6</sup> One word wouldn't do to describe Jesus of Nazareth's devotion to prayer.

This is clear when we consider the Gospel accounts. In the day to day, prayer was His pattern. We know Mark 1: **In the early morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house, and went away to a secluded place, and was praying there** (Mk 1:35). In Luke 5, we read that **Jesus would often slip away to the wilderness to pray** (Lk. 5:16).

So, like the intro to this sermon, we know that He prayed often. We know that He lost sleep to pray, getting up while it was still dark. But we should also know that it wasn't always just an hour or two. Before He chose the disciples in Luke 6, we read, **it was at this time that He went off to the mountain to pray, and He spent the whole night in prayer to God** (Lk. 6:12). He prayed often. He prayed in the ordinary. He prayed in ways that are *not* ordinary.

At His baptism, Luke tells us that He was praying (Lk. 3:21). Peter, James, and John climbed the mount of transfiguration so that they might pray (Lk. 9:28). He prayed for children (Mt. 19:13–15). He prayed for those afflicted by suffering (Mk. 7:34). He prayed for those whom He'd healed (Jn. 11:41). He prayed for Peter (Lk. 22:31–32). He prayed for the disciples (Jn. 17:6–19). He prayed for us (Jn. 17:20–26).

And those paragraphs merely touch the hem of His garment. When Luke says He prayed often, it's *probably* more than you've recently imagined. And if we were to broaden our definition of prayer to include a moment-by-moment dependence upon the Father, we could actually say He never ceased. He depended on God to meet His needs and to sustain Him at all times.<sup>7</sup>

And, again, it's imperative that we think of what He's done *as* what He's done in the days of His flesh. If not, we'll miss some of the grace.

Few help us think more clearly about Christ's humanity and its purpose than 4<sup>th</sup>-century theologian Athanasius. 1600 years ago, he wrote *this* concerning Christ's humanity: "He was not bound to the body, but rather was Himself wielding it."<sup>8</sup> This means that while He was in the flesh, He wasn't *controlled* by it. Instead, He wielded it, like an instrument, for His purposes.

One of which was to come and do what humanity was created to do. We weren't intended to live autonomous lives, independent from the One that fashioned us. So, He put on flesh to do what we haven't. In the days of His flesh, He depended upon the Father.

He did so in part by praying. *How* did He pray? Verse 7: **In the days of his flesh, He offered up both prayers and supplications with loud crying and tears**. As noted last week, the language of "loud crying and tears" certainly reminds us of Gethsemane, when Christ prayed fervently, and His sweat became like drops of blood (Lk. 22:44). Or maybe we think of one of His cries from the cross. He didn't deliver those dispassionately, matter-of-factly, as some sort of Stoic. When He quoted Psalm 22, Matthew writes that He **cried out with a loud voice** (Mt. 27:46). When

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<sup>6</sup> Cockerill, 243.

<sup>7</sup> Albert Mohler, *Hebrews*, CCE, 74.

<sup>8</sup> Athanasius, *On the Incarnation*, Popular Patristics Series, 87.

He quoted Psalm 31, **Into your hands I commit My Spirit**, Luke writes that He did so, **crying out with a loud voice** (Lk. 23:46).

He didn't pray without emotion because He didn't live apart from "feeling." B. B. Warfield's helpful "On the Emotional Life of Our Lord" carefully walks through the Gospels, pointing out instance after instance where the "Man of Sorrows" felt compassion, where He was troubled, where He was angry, where He marveled, and when He was glad.<sup>9</sup> He felt. He wept. He pitied. As a human, He was moved. Calvin wrote, "the Son of God having clothed himself with our flesh, of his own accord clothed himself also with human feelings, so that he did not differ at all from his brethren, sin only excepted."<sup>10</sup>

We're so used to living with fallen emotions—making sure *not* to trust or be directed *by* those emotions—that the emotional framework we've been given is often seen as evil in essence and in totality. But that's just not true. Yes, *our* emotions are fallen. All of them are affected by sin. But God gave them to us for His purposes, that we might feel compassion when it's needed, that we might sense fear when we're in danger, and that we not just rationally love—but experience affection—for others.

Even though we're often led astray by our emotions, Jesus's affections—*His* emotional framework—wasn't fallen. It was flawless. When He was supposed to be angry, He was. When He was supposed to be compassionate, He was. He wasn't emotional in the sense of being out of control or reactionary. His inner life was one of perfect balance and proportion.<sup>11</sup>

And that's how He prayed. At Gethsemane, He knew what was in the cup He was to drink.<sup>12</sup> So, in that garden He prayed fervently. It would be wrong to do so otherwise. The same could be said concerning His cry from Psalm 22 while hanging on the cross. Do we think it would've been *more* holy to have a stiff upper lip when facing the wrath of God for sinners?

The Psalms had categories for lament because the world groans. There's a sense in which fallen emotions can not only overreact, they can also underreact.<sup>13</sup> We can not care about something we should care about. Jesus took upon Himself the sin of the world. So, of course He prayed with loud crying and tears.

The Son—in the flesh—prayed. He did so, not on occasion, but in *every* occasion, depending upon the Father in every moment. And He did so—not with this or that aspect of His humanity—but with *all* of Himself—with His heart, soul, mind, and strength. That's how He prayed.

## 2. The One to Whom He Prays

Verse 7 goes on: **In the days of His flesh, He offered up both prayers and supplications with loud crying and tears to the One able to save Him from death.**

We asked last week if this meant He asked to be saved *from* death. And we answered by saying that wouldn't square with the Gospels. He told the disciples about the necessity of His death repeatedly. He set His face toward Jerusalem (Lk. 9:51). And in the end, nothing deterred Him from a bloody cross. Alongside the Gospels, consider the book of Hebrews and what *it* says about His death. In Hebrews 9 the author writes, **not through the blood of goats and calves, but through His own blood, He entered the holy place once for all** (Heb. 9:12). And in the next chapter, **we**

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<sup>9</sup> B. B. Warfield, *The Person and Work of Christ*, 93ff.

<sup>10</sup> John Calvin, *Commentary on the Gospel According to John*, 440.

<sup>11</sup> Dane Ortlund, *Gentle and Lowly*, 105.

<sup>12</sup> Charles Spurgeon, *The Agony in Gethsemane*, "He had not yet come to the raging billows of the penalty itself, but even standing on the shore, as he heard the awful surf breaking at his feet, his soul was sore amazed, and . . . heavy."

<sup>13</sup> Ortlund, 107.

**have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all** (Heb. 10:10).

So, we can make the case multiple ways. With the Gospels, with the book of Hebrews,<sup>14</sup> from the grammar of this verse itself, He wasn't praying that He'd be saved from dying, but that He'd be saved "out of" death.<sup>15</sup> Which seems to be, in some sense, actually the *harder* thing. Maybe by slamming on the brakes, or putting out a fire, or performing surgery we could save someone *from* dying. The harder thing, what we *can't* do, is save someone "out of" death.

The One who could is the One He prayed to.

Further, praying to be saved "out of" death implies *not* that He would escape it, but that He would, instead, certainly endure it. This too is intricately connected to Him becoming human. Because as God, He could not die. It wasn't possible. Hear Athanasius again: "Therefore since He was not able to die—(He) took to Himself a body able to die, that He might offer it as His own on behalf of all."<sup>16</sup> Then, 1600 years ago, Athanasius quotes from the book of Hebrews: **Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and might free those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives** (Heb. 2:14ff).

We know what it means to fear death. We're surrounded by those that do. He died so that we might be delivered from that fear. And from that enemy itself. He'd wielded His body on our behalf during His life. In death He did as well, rendering death powerless. How? After crying out to the One able to save out of death, verse 7 continues, **and He was heard**.

On a Sunday evening, the eleven disciples were gathered in a locked room, wondering together if the news the women shared could possibly be right. They'd said something that seemed too good to be true. Because the eleven were certain their Friend die on Friday. They saw it. There was no doubt. But, could the women be right? Did they see Him? And as the eleven discussed these things, Jesus Himself walked into the room and said something He'd said many times before, **Peace to you** (Lk. 24:36). Those familiar words startled the eleven. They thought they were seeing and hearing a spirit. This couldn't be real.

To address their doubts, what does Jesus say? **See my hands and my feet. Touch me, and see. For a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have** (Lk. 24:39). To address their doubts, to comfort them, and to steady their hope, He shows them His resurrected body. They felt the structure of His shoulder and the sincerity of His scars. He was like them. But He'd conquered that which plagues us. He proved it to the disciples in that room. And it's in our Bibles so that we too might be convinced.

The gospel isn't a ghost story.<sup>17</sup> He put on flesh. In the days of His flesh, He lived the life we were intended to. And because we haven't, He, clothed in humanity, died in our place. And then, so that we might live, so that we might be restored, in flesh and bone He rose.

He'd cried out to the One able to save Him out of death. And He was heard.

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<sup>14</sup> Ellingworth, 288.

<sup>15</sup> O'Brien, 68; Harold Attridge, *Hebrews*, 150.

<sup>16</sup> Athanasius, 95.

<sup>17</sup> Phil Ryken, *Luke*, REC, 671.

### 3. The Reason He's Heard

Verse 7 ends, **And He was heard because of His piety.**

So, why would His dependent prayer life be grace for us? Because His death was not only the climax of His earthly obedience—being obedient *to the point* of death (Phil. 2)—it was also the offering of His obedient humanity to God.<sup>18</sup> That's how verse 7 began, **In the days of His flesh he offered up.** Again, if the language of “offer up” brings to mind a priest offering sacrifice for the people, you're thinking rightly. In this case, however, the priest offers up *Himself*—His unblemished life—on our behalf. And He was heard because of His awe, His submission, His unyielding devotion, and perfect obedience.<sup>19</sup> That's why His life, including His prayer life, is grace for us.

Why else is this grace for us? Because what He's done in the flesh gives us access to God. Hebrews 10:20: **we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh.** The days of His flesh opened up a way. His embodied life makes our drawing near possible. He prayed so that we might too.

Why else is His prayer life grace for us? Because of *what* He prayed on our behalf. Consider John 17: **Father, I desire that they also, whom You have given Me, be with Me where I am, so that they may see My glory which You have given me, for You loved Me before the foundation of the world** (Jn. 17:24). Is the One able to save *out of death* able to answer *that*? Easy.

Finally, His prayer life is grace for us because the prayer life of the Son isn't merely past tense. He's our High Priest. He's before the throne of God, continuing to intercede for us. And, because of what He did in the days of His flesh, He continues to be heard.

### Conclusion

Why is it so important that He do all this **in the days of His flesh**? For one more insight from Athanasius, “It was not non-existent things that needed salvation, so that a command alone would have sufficed, but the human being, already in existence, who was corrupted and perishing.”<sup>20</sup> We don't trust the days of *our* flesh. We don't trust the *best* day of our flesh. We trust *all* of His. His putting on flesh, in the place of humanity, so that He might wield His body for the good of a people.

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<sup>18</sup> Cockerill, 244.

<sup>19</sup> Mohler, 75; Attridge, 121.

<sup>20</sup> Athanasius, 147.