

Prayer in the Gospel of Luke

Obviously prayer was important in Luke's life. The following instances of Jesus at prayer are found only in Luke. Jesus was praying after his baptism when the heavens opened (3:21). After the cure of the leper Jesus withdrew to the wilderness and prayed (5:16). The parallel in Mark has Jesus praying only once ἀπῆλθεν εἰς ἔρημον τόπον κάκει προσήχεται but in Luke 5:16 it was Jesus' custom, ἦν ὑποχωρῶν (was withdrawing) ἐν ταῖς ἐρήμοις καὶ προσευχόμενος. (the periphrastic construction in Luke rather than the aorist in Mark indicates habitual action.). Jesus spent all night on the hills in prayer before he chose the Twelve (6:12-16). Jesus was praying alone when he asked the disciples "Who do the people say I am?" (9:18-22). Eight days later he took Peter, James and John and went up on the mountain to pray (9:28) and while praying he was transfigured (9:29). Jesus prayed for Simon that his faith might not fail (22:32). It is perhaps suggested in 22:39 that Jesus prayed frequently in the Mount of Olives. Only Luke tells us that Jesus prayed for his crucifiers (23:34) and committed his spirit into the hands of Father (23:46).

Furthermore, only in Luke do we find Jesus teaching the Parables of the Importunate Friend at Midnight (11:5-8) and the Unjust Judge (18:1-8) on the importance of petitionary prayer and praying always (18:1), and the Parable of the Pharisee and Tax collector on humble prayer (18:9-14). Luke does not regard prayer as magic, that whatever we pray for will be granted, thus the story of the withered fig tree is omitted (Matt 21:20-22; Mark 11:20-26). Also the promise in Matt 7:11 that the Father will give good things to those who ask, in Luke 11:13 reads as the Father giving the Holy Spirit to those who ask.

In addition to prayer material only in his Gospel, Luke also included material common to the other Synoptics. Like Matthew (6:9-13), Luke tells of Jesus teaching his disciples how to pray the Our Father (11:2-4), but only Luke tells us that it was one of the disciples who asked Jesus to teach (11:1), a sign that Jesus' communion with his Father impressed the disciples. All three synoptics mention Jesus praying in Gethsemane to overcome temptation (Matt 26:36-46; Mark 14:32-42; Luke 22:39-46), an example to Christians that prayer overcomes temptation. All three synoptics mention Jesus praying as he died on the cross; Matt 27:46; Mark 15:34 both quoting Ps 22:1; Luke 23:46 quoting Ps 31:5.