

Text: Luke 3:21-22

Title: “An Open Heaven”

“UPGRADE” SERMON BUMPER –Today is the official launch of our 40 Days to Greater Intimacy with God through Prayer. We want you, first, to UPGRADE your daily habit of spending time alone with God in prayer and in His Word. We have 40 Days workbooks available for you to purchase at the “I’m a Disciple” table in the Welcome Center. Then we want you to UPGRADE your connection with other believers in a small group that can be either your SBS class or a group that meets some other time and place during the week. I’m teaching a 40 Days Bible study on Wednesday evenings which will allow you to connect with others in prayer and encouragement. Details are in your worship folder.

Open your Bibles to Luke 3:21. Over the next seven weeks we’re going to trace the prayer life of Jesus through the Gospel of Luke. Luke gives us more details about how, when, where and what Jesus prayed than any of the other Gospels. We know that Jesus grew up in a devout Jewish family, and so he and Mary and Joseph would have practiced the daily times of prayer and would have prayed often in the Temple. But the first recorded account of Jesus Himself praying comes at a very significant time as He launches His public ministry. Luke tells us that John the Baptist, as he is called, has been calling Israel to repentance, symbolized through baptism. John knows that he is the forerunner of the Messiah and he’s been preaching about the One who would come to baptize them, not just with water, but with the Holy Spirit. So people were coming to be baptized by John. **Read Luke 3:21-22.**

Then in v.21 we get this cryptic statement by Luke ... “And as he was praying...” This is the first record we have in the Gospels of Jesus’ praying. So much of the teaching of Jesus revolved around prayer, but I want us to focus on the actual praying of Jesus ... when, how, where and what He prayed. We’ll learn to pray by watching Jesus pray.

ILLUSTRATION – As a young man there were a few people who really made a spiritual investment in my life. One was a guy named Lamoin Champ. He was my pastor part of the time I was in college and he remained a mentor to me after I became a pastor. Lamoin understood intimacy with God in prayer and he taught me so much about it. But I didn’t just learn from what he said; I learned from what he did. One day I visited him at his church and he said, “Mike, I want to show you where I spend most of my time alone with God. We walked down the hallway in

an education building and stopped outside a door. Lamoin leaned against that door and with tears in his eyes he said, “Mike, I can’t tell you how much I love meeting God in this room.” I expected to walk into a nice, carpeted study with bookshelves lining the wall. I was shocked when he opened the door into an empty Sunday School class room. The only furniture in the room was one of those old metal Sunday School teacher’s tables, a folding chair and a small pillow on the hard floor to cushion his knees when he knelt to pray ... nothing else. It was the powerful presence of God that decorated that room when Lamoin met God there in prayer. A few years later I invited Lamoin to come to speak at a prayer conference when I was a pastor in New Mexico. Once again, I looked forward to learning from what Lamoin taught about prayer, but also just being with Lamoin when he prayed. I remember on the Monday morning of the conference we decided to go for a prayer walk. The local golf course was closed on Mondays so I suggested we go walk and pray along the cart paths at the golf course. As we walked along we started praying out loud. Lamoin was so burdened that God would send revival and as he prayed his voice got louder and louder, more and more passionate, and the next thing I know he is down on his face in the middle of the fairway crying out to God in prayer. Honestly, I didn’t know what to do. I’m sad to say that my first instinct was to look around and wonder if anyone was looking. Wouldn’t they think this was strange? Would they call 9-1-1 to come check on this guy lying there on the ground? Finally, I just knelt down on the ground and prayed along with Lamoin for the longest time. I’ll never forget what I learned from watching and listening to Lamoin pray.

And that’s the way it was for Jesus. Thanks to Gospel writers like Luke, we get to see how Jesus in His complete humanity enjoyed and experienced intimacy with His Father in prayer. We get to see how Jesus expressed His total dependency on the Father in prayer ... how Jesus verbalized His absolute commitment to the Father in prayer ... how Jesus drew strength for His ministry with the Father in prayer. And if Jesus needed this kind of intimacy with the Father, how much more do we as weak followers of Jesus need that intimacy with the Father.

Now speaking of the Father, it was Jesus go-to name for the Lord. When we hear Jesus praying we hear Him almost exclusively calling on His “Father.” The title is an intimate and endearing name for God; it combines His supernatural authority with His tender care and mercy toward His children.

But it must be frustrating to God that His children settle for so little time with Him. We can ignore Him for vast chunks of our day, never thinking to pray or praise or

give thanks or ask for His help. Maybe that's because deep down inside many of us doubt if praying really does any good. We're like the people Job spoke about in...

Job 21:15 - Who is the Almighty, that we should serve him? What would we gain by praying to him?

Last year I made a point of being more deliberate and detailed in maintaining my prayer list, including the recording of answers to prayer. Two weeks ago I went through and counted more than seventy specific answers to prayer. Wow! What an encouragement to me. God is faithful. When we ask He gives. When we seek we find. When we knock the door is opened.

And we see that in the praying of Jesus. His prayer life shows us why it's important for us today as believers.

1. JESUS LIVED UNDER AN OPEN HEAVEN.

Luke 3:21b - And as he was praying, heaven was opened

"He was praying." Luke uses a present tense verb there meaning Jesus prayed repeatedly and continuously. That was the pattern of Jesus' life. He was just online with the Father continuously. And He lived under an open heaven.

Remember Jesus in His Model Prayer taught us to pray, "Father in heaven, may your will be done on earth as it is in heaven." So Jesus is standing on earth and He perfectly sees what's on the Father's mind and heart in heaven. There was nothing blocking the will of His Father in heaven from being done here on earth. There was no sin that numbed His sensitivity to the Father's will. There was no worry or care that kept Him from fully experiencing the Father's presence right there on the banks of the Jordan River. There was nothing that blocked the blessings of heaven from falling upon Jesus' life. Amazing.

Jesus lived under an open heaven ... and so can we. But are we willing to pay the price that Jesus paid in prevailing prayer. Instead we live like practical atheist. Of course we would never say that God doesn't exist, but we act that way when we don't open our lives to Him in prayer so that He can open heaven to us. Forgetting God is the root of all of our misery, isn't it?

Heaven's opening reveals that God is open and receptive to our prayers. God wants us to pray. He delights in hearing the prayers of His people. His promise to answer prayer is given as an incentive to encourage us pray.

When we pray, heaven's door is opened and we are ushered to the very throne of grace.

Hebrews 4:16 - Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

Hebrews 10:22a - let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith...

When we approach God in this way our minds are cleared and opened to God's will. We turn loose of our pride and our fear and whatever else keeps us from approaching God properly and we can pray from heaven's perspective. God stands ready to pour out the blessings of heaven on us when we pray.

So because Jesus prayed He lived under an open heaven. But also...

2. JESUS LIVED IN THE FULLNESS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT.

Luke doesn't record this here in v.21, but John is confused by Jesus' coming to be baptized. Matthew's Gospel account explains that John, knowing that Jesus was the Messiah, protested. "Jesus, *you* should be baptizing *me*." But Jesus said, "John, let's do this because it's the righteous thing to do." Jesus' baptism was not for repentance of sins, since we know that Jesus never sinned. But Jesus went through with it to set an example that baptism is important, but also because it was a time of commitment for Jesus. This is the first thing Jesus does as He starts His earthly ministry. Just three short years later Jesus would be crucified for our sins and after that raised from the dead for our salvation. Jesus would change the whole meaning of the symbol of baptism as a picture of His death, burial and resurrection. So when Jesus came to be baptized by John at the start of His public ministry, Jesus knew where this would take Him and He surrendered Himself to the Father's will for His life in prayer and as He does...

Luke 3:22a - and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove.

Now this was not the first time the Spirit of God came upon Jesus. We know that He was conceived in and by the Holy Spirit. As the Second Person of the Trinity

Jesus was fully God so He fully possessed the Holy Spirit without measure. So this would have been a fresh filling and anointing of the Holy Spirit for the purpose of empowering Him for the ministry that was before Him.

Jesus lived every minute of every day in the fullness of the Holy Spirit ... and so can we. Jesus needed the Holy Spirit for His mission and so do we. Everything we do as women and men, as husbands and wives, as moms and dads, as pastors or deacons or teachers must be done in the power of the Holy Spirit. That starts when we surrender to God like Jesus did in prayer.

Luke 11:13 - If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"

This happens when we first trust Jesus Christ as our Savior. When we ask Him to save us He gives us His Holy Spirit. The Bible calls the Holy Spirit the down payment of our redemption. But there's more to this, I believe. There are times when we need an extra measure of the Holy Spirit. This is just the grace of God that comes to us in our weakness by the Holy Spirit.

Remember, forgetting God is the root of all of our misery. Why would we want to live any part of our day or any part of our life without the fullness of the Holy Spirit.

So Jesus lived under an open heaven, He lived in the fullness of the Holy Spirit and...

3. JESUS LIVED WITH THE FATHER'S LOVING FAVOR.

So heaven opened and the Spirit came down from heaven, but then ...

Luke 3:22b - And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased."

Jesus often spoke of the love relationship between Himself and the Father. He said, "As the Father has loved me so I have loved you." And the Father verbalized that love to Jesus in an audible way on this occasion when Jesus was praying.

Notice that with Jesus praying is not just talking to God; it is hearing from God. Yes, the primary way that God speaks to us is by His Word so it's important for us

to pray with our Bibles open. But I'm convinced that God speaks by His Spirit specifically applying the truths of Scripture to our hearts.

I think about those words from the hymn "In the Garden": "And He walks with me and he talks with me and He tells me I am His own. And the joy we share as we tarry there no other has ever known."

We need to hear God speaking those words over us. There are times when we don't pray because we're not sure we're on speaking terms with God. Is He mad at us? Do we have the right to come into His presence?

There'll never be any kind of intimacy with God if you don't see Him as your Father and if you aren't convinced that He loves you and is pleased with you. Doubts about your salvation may keep us from approaching God in faith. We may hear the accusations of Satan, "Why are you talking to God? You're just a sinner. You don't have the right to ask God for anything."

Listen, because of all that Jesus has done for us in redemption the way has been opened for us to go into the very presence of the Father. The Bible says that the Holy Spirit bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God. We can hear the Father say to us, "You are my child. I love you. I am pleased with you because my Son has satisfied all my judgment against your sin."

So the next time you go to prayer and you feel those accusations and those reservations before God. Here's what you do. As you enter the presence of God in prayer just say, "I don't deserve to be here, but I'm with Him."