

Matthew 14:23

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And when he had sent the multitudes away, he went up into a mountain apart to pray: and when the evening was come, he was there alone.

Analysis

'And when he had sent the multitudes away, he went up into a mountain apart to pray: and when the evening was come, he was there alone.' After intensive ministry—teaching, healing, feeding 5000, managing messianic fervor—Jesus seeks solitude for prayer. He went 'up into a mountain' (εἰς τὸ ὄρος/eis to oros), 'apart' (κατ' ἰδίαν/kat' idian, privately, alone), 'to pray' (προσεύξασθαι/proseuxasthai). Reformed theology sees this demonstrating:

1. Jesus's full humanity—He needed prayer, communion with Father
2. Priority of prayer—even during intense ministry, He made time
3. Solitude's necessity—effective ministry requires withdrawal for spiritual renewal
4. Jesus's example—if He needed prayer, how much more do we? The timing—evening, after crowds departed—shows Jesus prioritizing communion with Father over rest.

Mountains were traditional prayer locations (Moses, Elijah), symbolizing nearness to God. Jesus's prayer life was constant, deliberate, essential—modeling dependence on Father despite His deity. This challenges activism valuing constant ministry over spiritual disciplines. Effective service flows from communion with God.

Historical Context

Mountains held spiritual significance in Jewish tradition: Sinai (law given), Carmel (Elijah's victory), Horeb (Elijah's encounter with God). Jesus frequently withdrew to mountains/deserted places for prayer (Matthew 14:23, Mark 1:35, Luke 5:16, 6:12, 9:28). These weren't brief prayers but extended communion—Luke records Jesus praying all night before choosing apostles (Luke 6:12). After feeding 5000 and managing crowd's kingship attempt, Jesus needed Father's perspective, strength, guidance. His prayer life demonstrates that divine power operates through dependence, not independence. Early church followed this pattern: Acts repeatedly records believers praying before major decisions, during crises, for direction. Throughout history, spiritual giants have maintained rigorous prayer disciplines: early Christians' daily hours, monastics' liturgical prayers, Reformers' prayer emphasis, Puritans' 'closet prayer,' revival leaders' intercession. The pattern holds: powerful ministry emerges from deep prayer. Modern activism often reverses this, attempting ministry without adequate communion with God.

Related Passages

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Psalms 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Study Questions

1. What does Jesus's example teach about balancing ministry activity with prayer and solitude?
2. How do you prioritize communion with God even during intense ministry or busy seasons?
3. What happens to your ministry effectiveness when prayer is neglected versus prioritized?

Interlinear Text

καὶ	ἀπολύσας	τοὺς	ὄχλους	ἀνέβη	εἰς	τὸ	ὄρος
And	away	G3588	the multitudes	he went up	into	G3588	a mountain
G2532	G630		G3793	G305	G1519		G3735
κατ'	ἰδίαν	προσεύξασθαι	ὥσίας	δὲ	γενομένης		
apart	G2398	to pray	when the evening	and	was come		
G2596		G4336	G3798	G1161	G1096		
μόνος	ἦν	ἐκεῖ					
alone	he was	there					
G3441	G2258	G1563					

Additional Cross-References

Luke 6:12 (Prayer): And it came to pass in those days, that he went out into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God.

Mark 6:46 (Prayer): And when he had sent them away, he departed into a mountain to pray.

Acts 6:4 (Prayer): But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word.

Matthew 26:36 (Prayer): Then cometh Jesus with them unto a place called Gethsemane, and saith unto the disciples, Sit ye here, while I go and pray yonder.

Matthew 6:6 (Prayer): But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly.

Luke 9:28 (Prayer): And it came to pass about an eight days after these sayings, he took Peter and John and James, and went up into a mountain to pray.