

Is There A Better Way To Pray?

Today I'd like to examine one of the greatest examples of prayer that we have in all of Scripture, and it's very simple.

It is the prayer that Jesus prayed while in the garden of Gethsemane just after the last supper. To me, it is the perfect example of a surrendered prayer life. It is honest and He yielded to His Father's will.

There is a lot to be learned from the words that were said that night, let's take a look...

John 17: ¹ After saying all these things, Jesus looked up to heaven and said, "Father, the hour has come. Glorify your Son so he can give glory back to you.

Jesus knew what was coming next. It was the event that finalized His work here on earth, the crucifixion. Most of us know that Jesus is God in the flesh, but in these passages, we also see that He was also human.

When He first arrives at the garden He becomes filled with grief:

Mark 14: ³³ He took Peter, James, and John with him, and he became deeply troubled and distressed. ³⁴ He told them, "My soul is crushed with grief to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me."

Isn't this interesting? The overwhelming events ahead must have been unbearable to think about.

As anyone that is faced with fears or grief should do, He

prays:

³⁵ *He went on a little farther and fell to the ground. He prayed that, if it were possible, the awful hour awaiting him might pass him by.* ³⁶ *“Abba, Father,” he cried out, “everything is possible for you. Please take this cup of suffering away from me. Yet I want your will to be done, not mine.”*

Now it gets even more interesting.

Although He knows that He is to die and offer the atoning sacrifice for all mankind, He prays that the suffering be taken away from Him.

Hebrews 7: ²⁷ *Unlike those other high priests, he does not need to offer sacrifices every day. They did this for their own sins first and then for the sins of the people. But Jesus did this once for all when he offered himself as the sacrifice for the people’s sins.*

To me, when I began to understand that Jesus asked not to go through with it, it gave me much joy, mostly because I could relate to Jesus. Although He was perfect, He had this human element that we all share. So the next time we pray “I don’t want to go through with this.”, we can look back on this verse and feel OK, we’re in good company. He was faced with circumstances that He did not want to face. This is just being honest and transparent before His Father. Dare I say that this is the weakest moment of his ministry? But the prayer didn’t end there.

“Yet I want your will to be done, not mine.”

It was more important to Him to have His Father’s will done than His own. This was yielding to His Father’s will.

He not only prayed this prayer once but three times:

Matthew 26: ⁴² Then Jesus left them a second time and prayed, "My Father! If this cup cannot be taken away unless I drink it, your will be done."

...

⁴⁴ So he went to pray a third time, saying the same things again.

So like any child, He kept asking. (Practicing what He's preached) He might've wanted to ask more, but time had run out, the "lynch mob" had arrived, led by Judas Iscariot (evil villain).

It's in Luke we read that "an angel from heaven appeared and strengthened Him":

Luke 22: ⁴¹ He walked away, about a stone's throw, and knelt down and prayed, ⁴² "Father, if you are willing, please take this cup of suffering away from me. Yet I want your will to be done, not mine." ⁴³ Then an angel from heaven appeared and strengthened him. ⁴⁴ He prayed more fervently, and he was in such agony of spirit that his sweat fell to the ground like great drops of blood.

Notice also in verse 44 we read that He was in such agony that we sweat drops of blood!

When the mob does show up, after these prayers, we see a different Jesus. After Peter slashed off the ear of Malchus, the high priest's slave, Jesus had these words to say:

Matthew 26: ⁵² "Put away your sword," Jesus told him. "Those who use the sword will die by the sword. ⁵³ Don't you realize that I could ask my Father for thousands of angels to protect

us, and he would send them instantly? ⁵⁴ But if I did, how would the Scriptures be fulfilled that describe what must happen now?"

This is significant.

This is why the "Thy will be done" is so important. Jesus knew that if He would not have prayed for the Father's will, and asked for protection, it would not have pleased His Father and Jesus would have none of that.

John 5: ¹⁹ So Jesus explained, "I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself. He does only what he sees the Father doing. Whatever the Father does, the Son also does.

Just like anything, "Thy will be done" comes off the tongue real easy, but it is not easy for me to pray it like I mean it.

A hypothetical situation

For practical application, let's read about Tom and his wife Barb (fictional characters)...

A hard-working, God-fearing man, Tom, makes a mistake at the office. Not just any mistake, but a doozy. He loses a huge account for the company he works for because of this mistake. He knows that the company will review the situation and hold a disciplinary meeting that could result in the loss of his job.

Tom is quite concerned at this point and is surprised that he'd even commit a mistake like that to begin with. So he prays "Lord, please help me keep my job, the idea of being fired is unbearable." The Lord, being the generous God that He is, has the company find favor with Tom and they decide to keep him. Praise God, that is wonderful!

But what if God had other plans in mind? Here's an alternative

ending. Suppose Tom had prayed this prayer "Lord, anything is possible for you, can you help me keep my job? Yet I want your will to be done, not mine." The next day Tom gets fired. He's gone. He gets the boot. He's sacked. He's absolutely miserable.

The next day and in the days to come, he has more time to read his Bible, spend time with his wife, Barb, and he starts to see things from a different perspective. "I'm not so tense, he says to himself". Weeks go by and he actually grows closer to God and to Barb. Yes, there is a financial strain and some humiliation (which is good), but his relationships are better off.

He's already better off, God already worked out a plan that is better for Tom. Even if Tom gets a job that doesn't pay as well perhaps he won't have the tension or the long hours, he's found that it is more valuable to him to spend more time with God and with his wife. Maybe God has a better job in mind that will pay him more and have fewer hours.

You can see where I'm going with this and this can play out in many ways. Most of the time it is difficult to know the will of God, but I think we need to give Him a chance in our lives just to show how great He is rather than keeping control over it ourselves.

We serve a God who knows everything about our future.

Of course, Tom wants to keep his job, that's all he knows and few people like the "unknown". Perhaps it is God's will for him to keep his job. God gave him the job and he's got great friends there. If it's God's will to keep the job and he keeps it, then Tom will give God all the praise and thank God from the rooftops for His mercy and grace.

Suppose God has other plans. How is Tom to know what's best for him? Does he know the future and can he figure out where

he should be to maximize his potential and glorify God?

So if it is God's will for Tom to be fired, doesn't God know what's best for him? Doesn't God care more about their marriage than they do? (absolutely)

Remember Job? God not only knew what Job would have to endure but gave Satan permission to humble him, stripping everything away from him. Job had no idea why it happened and suffered greatly while experiencing tremendous loss. Little did he know at the time that God had it all planned out. At the end of the story, he was awarded twice what was lost and became a better man of God than before. What an amazing God!

Here are a couple passages that provide food for thought:

Isaiah 29:

¹⁶ How foolish can you be?

He is the Potter, and he is certainly greater than you, the clay!

*Should the created thing say of the one who made it,
"He didn't make me"?*

Does a jar ever say,

"The potter who made me is stupid"?

Isaiah 55: *⁹ For just as the heavens are higher than the earth,*

so my ways are higher than your ways

and my thoughts higher than your thoughts.

**Will you give God the chance to do what He wants
with you?**

"Dear Lord, You are my maker, why is it so easy for me to forget that? You are good, loving and only have what's in my best interests. Please change my heart so that I will follow you more closely. You are the one that gives me life. Thank you for all that you've done in my life thus far, but I want

things to change between me and you. I want your will to be done from now on, Lord. I plan on changing my prayer and allowing you to have your way with my life because I believe that you can do a better job with it than I can. It's scary sometimes when I think about what might happen in the future but I will trust in you, thank you Father! In Jesus' name, amen."

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