

Prayers of Jesus

Reflections 1

Jesus raises Lazarus from the Dead

John 11: 38-44

Jesus, once more deeply moved, came to the tomb. It was a cave with a stone laid across the entrance. **39** "Take away the stone," he said. "But, Lord," said Martha, the sister of the dead man, "by this time there is a bad odour, for he has been there four days." **40** Then Jesus said, "Did I not tell you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?" **41** So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said, **"Father, I thank you that you have heard me. 42 I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me."** **43** When he had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" **44** The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face. Jesus said to them, "Take off the grave clothes and let him go."

Gethsemane

Matthew 26: 36-46 (Mark 14: 32-42; Luke 22: 39-46)

Then Jesus went with his disciples to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to them, "Sit here while I go over there and pray." **37** He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee along with him, and he began to be sorrowful and troubled. **38** Then he said to them, "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me." **39** Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, **"My Father, (Abba) if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will."** **40** Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. "Couldn't you men keep watch with me for one hour?" he asked Peter. **41** "Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak." **42** He went away a second time and prayed, **"My Father, (Abba) if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done."** **43** When he came back, he again found them sleeping, because their eyes were heavy. **44** So he left them and went away once more and prayed the third time, saying the same thing. **45** Then he returned to the disciples and said to them, "Are you still sleeping and resting? Look, the hour has come, and the Son of Man is delivered into the hands of sinners. **46** Rise! Let us go! Here comes my betrayer!"

Jesus' Death

Luke 23:34

Two other men, both criminals, were also led out with him to be executed. **33** When they came to the place called the Skull, they crucified him there, along with the criminals—one on his right, the other on his left. **34** Jesus said, **"Father, (Abba) forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing."** And they divided up his clothes by casting lots.

Matthew 27: 45-46 (Mark 15: 33-41; Luke 23: 44-49; John 19: 28-30)

From noon until three in the afternoon darkness came over all the land. **46** About three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, **"Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" (which means "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?")**

Luke 23: 44-49

It was now about noon, and darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon, **45** for the sun stopped shining. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two. **46** Jesus called out with a loud voice, **"Father, (Abba) into your hands I commit my spirit."** When he had said this, he breathed his last. **47** The centurion, seeing what had happened, praised God and said, "Surely this was a righteous man." **48** When all the people who had gathered to witness this sight saw what took place, they beat their breasts and went away. **49** But all those who knew him, including the women who had followed him from Galilee, stood at a distance, watching these things.

Lazarus death and resurrection was the final 'sign' to be found in John related to Jesus' mission on earth. It was a sign that Jesus was the giver of life and he wanted to be sure that this sign was understood as coming from God and that it was God who had sent him to deliver it. He wanted the people to know that what he did was under his heavenly Father's authority and power. This seventh sign reveals God's purpose for the world. God's glory would be revealed.

In the prayer of Matthew 26:36-46 Jesus' humanity comes to light. The emotional pain he is suffering indicates his awareness of just how hard this final step is going to be for him. Jesus says, "*My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death.*"

We learn here that in a time of dire need Jesus didn't hesitate to pour out his heart to his heavenly Father. He didn't hide or ignore him. He didn't try to solve the situation himself. He took it all to his Father in heaven. He knew from past experience that God always hears his prayers and that he would answer them. The answer may not be what he wanted but it would be according to his Father's will and it would be right. He knew his heavenly Father could be trusted, even with his life.

In Jesus' prayers from the cross in Luke 23:34, Matthew 26:36-46, 27:45-46 and Luke 23:44-49, in both the Luke references Jesus acknowledges his Father, and he calls him 'Abba.' It connotes a sense of familiarity, security, safety and unconditional love, respect and awe.

In Matthew 27, and only in this reference, Jesus does not use the word 'Abba'. This is the only time in the Gospels when Jesus is praying that he doesn't call his Father 'Abba.'

We also learn from the Luke 23:34 reference that even on the cross Jesus is thinking of his people. He asks for forgiveness for those who have wronged him. Here he offers the ultimate example of what it means to forgive those who have sinned against us. The reference to the Lord's Prayer is very clear. Jesus' model even at the point of death is obvious to us. We are to ask for forgiveness for our sin in the context of forgiving those who sin against us.

In Matthew 27 Jesus was possibly meditating on this Psalm 22 while enduring the cross holding on to the hope that the Psalm offered. So while Jesus cries out, "My God! My God! Why have you forsaken me," he continues to trust in his heavenly Father.

In quoting from this Psalm Jesus is pointing to the hope that, those who believe in him, have regarding eternal life. The hope is that Jesus is the giver of life. Jesus has completed the mission set before him. He has done his Father's will. He has suffered the complete desolation of utter separation from his Father. Yet, he still calls out to his Father in heaven, the one who would make it all right again with Jesus' resurrection.

In Luke 23:46, even at the point of death, even after he has acknowledged that his Father had forsaken him, Jesus still calls God Abba and offers himself up to his heavenly Father, he prays, "*Father into your hands I commit my spirit.*" These words are a reference to Psalm 31:5 and reflect the faith and trust Jesus has in his Father. Our God is a God who always keeps his promises. He had promised that Jesus' would be raised from death. He had promised that through Jesus' death we would now have the possibility of a restored relationship with God as our Heavenly Father. So Jesus cries, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit."

Jesus taught his people even while on the cross. In the Lord's Prayer he taught his disciples to pray for deliverance from evil and on the cross he offered his disciples an example of what to do when adversity will not go away, when it is ever present. Jesus shows his disciples that at these times one must offer himself up to God to do his will whatever that may be. He is showing them that his God, their God, can be trusted through all adversity even unto death.

Reflect on:

1. Think about your pattern of prayer. How and when do you pray? What causes you to pray? What do you expect when you pray? What is your picture of Jesus as you pray?
2. How does your pattern of prayer compare to what you currently know about Jesus and his prayer life?
3. Jesus' prayers in Gethsemane were heartfelt and painful. Hebrews 5:7 says, "*During the days of Jesus' life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with fervent cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission.*" What does Jesus example of prayer in Gethsemane teach you about asking that the hard stuff you are facing for him be taken away from you?
4. In Luke 23:34 Jesus modelled the words of the Lord's Prayer for us. Even though Jesus never sinned he still asked for forgiveness for those who were sinning against him. When do you find this hard to do and what do you do at those times?
5. In Matthew 27:45-46 Jesus is quoting from Psalm 22. What is the hope that Jesus was clinging to? What is your hope? Do you find this Psalm an encouragement? If so, why or why not?
6. When Jesus prayed, "Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I knew that you always hear me," he prayed with confidence knowing that his prayers were always heard and answered. He prayed that the 'cup' might be taken from him while in Gethsemane. This prayer wasn't answered the way he wanted it to be. Hebrews 5:8 tells us that Jesus learned obedience from what he suffered. Sometimes God says No! to our requests. How to you respond to this? What did Jesus do?
7. What is your personal response to Jesus' prayer asking for forgiveness of those who were sinning against him?

Concluding Thoughts

Trust, obedience, forgiveness and encouragement are the words that come to my mind when I dwell on the five passages chosen for this study. Jesus gave us examples of what it means to act on our trust in our heavenly father knowing that he only wants what is best for us. He did this by being obedient to God even though he asked that, 'this cup might be taken from him.'

We have learned that Jesus was serious about asking for forgiveness for those who sin against us. It was not just a throw away line in the Lord's Prayer. In fact we know there will be consequences for those of us who are not obedient in this matter, for Matthew 6: 14-15 says, "*For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.*"

We can be encouraged through God's word as we see how Jesus was encouraged through his use of the Psalms as he faced his death, for us. Jesus used the Psalms to help him pray. So can we. The Psalms are a wonderful source of encouragement and they show us how we can appropriately cry out to God in our anguish and pain knowing that he understands us and hears us and will answer our prayers as he did for the Psalmists and for Jesus.