

### **Jesus Praying: Confession, Petition, Adoration**

Back in the old days, when people used to read newspapers (remember newspapers?), there was always a page of cartoons. One of them was Dennis the Menace. Remember that one? Dennis was a pesky kid who was always in trouble or causing trouble, especially for his neighbor, Mr. Wilson. Well, in one of those strips, the first three cartoon panels showed Dennis doing all sorts of pesky things: digging in the flower garden, throwing rocks at a cat and harassing Mr. Wilson. In the last frame, he's in his pajamas, kneeling at his bedside, praying. His simple prayer is: "Lord, I'm here to turn myself in."

In John chapter 18, immediately after Jesus has prayed the wonderful prayer of chapter 17, it says:

**When he had finished praying, Jesus left with his disciples and crossed the Kidron Valley. On the other side there was an olive grove, and he and his disciples went into it.** (John 18:1)

Oddly, though it says that John was with Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, John doesn't record what Matthew, Mark and Luke record, which is Jesus' prayer there. However, though Matthew was in the Upper Room, he doesn't record the prayer John recorded in chapter 17. I don't know why each of the gospel writers included or excluded what they did; I'm just happy that we have what we have and that what one left out, the other included and all together we have a full and robust picture of the life of Christ.

So, today, we're going to examine Jesus' prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane because in it we see three other major forms of prayer that should be part of our prayer regiment as well: Confession, Petition and Adoration. First...

#### **I. Prayer of Confession/Repentance**

In the prayer that Jesus taught us to pray, sometimes called "The Lord's Prayer," He instructs us to say:

**"Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors."** (Matt. 6:12)

In Luke's version of this teaching, he remembers Jesus saying:

**"...forgive us our sins; for we also forgive everyone that is indebted to us."** (Lk. 11:4 KJV)

So, Jesus is using the words "sins" and "debts" interchangeably. They mean "that which is offensive to God." We owe Him obedience. When we sin, we withhold obedience and instead, give rebellion. So, that's every person's debt to God.

Jesus, in the garden, is teaching us to follow Dennis the Menace's example and each night, "turn ourselves in." There are two other Bible words that encompass what Jesus is teaching. Those words are "confess" and "repent." They're not the same words and they aren't really to be used interchangeably. The Greek word for "confess" is *homologeō* and the Greek word for "repent" is *metanoia*. *Homologeō* means to "agree, admit, concede, acknowledge." When we confess, we're agreeing with God. We're admitting our guilt. It's a mental, not a physical action.

*Metanoia* can mean to “change your mind” but it is also usually attached to “changed behavior” or a “change of direction.” Heb. 6:1:

**...repentance from acts that lead to death...**

And the apostle Paul taught in Acts 26:20:

**...that they should repent and turn to God and prove their repentance by their deeds.**

So, confession and repentance together mean to “change your mind” and “change your deeds.”

Now, what does this have to do with what Jesus prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane? Jesus never needed to “confess” or “repent” regarding sin in His life. BUT He DID demonstrate a “repentant” attitude toward sin itself. What do I mean by that? Jesus DID know the power of temptation and he DID know what it felt like to be guilty though He never sinned. I Peter 2:24:

**He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree...**

This literally could be translated, “...he brought our sins in his body to the cross...” So, the one thing you must never say is that “Jesus just doesn’t know how I feel! He never sinned, so He doesn’t know how hard it is to confess!” You’re wrong! He does know how hard it is. And He didn’t carry just one person’s sin, He carried the full weight of ALL OUR SIN. The truth is, WE don’t know what real guilt feels like. We only have a small taste of sin. Jesus felt the full weight of ALL OUR SINS, ALL OUR GUILT.

And it was the anticipation of carrying that weight of all our guilt that caused Jesus to experience a near mental breakdown. He had no sin of His own, but He was experiencing what we experience when we HAVE sinned. He prayed:

**“Abba, Father... everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me...”** (Mk. 14:36)

Do you see it? Jesus is “repenting,” He’s asking the Father to let Him go another direction because of sin. Not His own sin, but because of our sin! But what difference does it make to Jesus at this point? He’s feeling the weight of sin – all the guilt, all the pain, all the regret. Even though Jesus never sinned, He knows what it feels like to sin, to repent, to want another way in life.

Real confession and repentance are not easy. False confession and token repentance ARE easy. You know what I’m talking about. Someone does something or says something about you that really hurts. They tell a lie about you and it spreads throughout the entire office or the whole school. They then feel a stab of guilt and so they come to you and say, “Hey, you know, I didn’t mean anything by what I said. I hope you didn’t think I was serious! I was just having a little fun. So, are we okay?” Fake confession and token repentance are easy, they’re cheap.

But real confession and real repentance are hard because they’re costly. You have to go back, assess the damage you caused by talking to the person you hurt and then pay the price necessary to make amends. Jesus paid the price necessary as if He were the guilty one. When we confess and repent, we aren’t paying for our sin, we’re simply acknowledging what Jesus paid for us.

**If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.** (I John 1:9)

Hopefully, the person you sinned against will forgive you. Jesus says that they should. But even if they don’t, by your real confession and real repentance, God promises to work on your behalf to bring healing to the injury you caused and to remove the guilt you carried.

The second form of prayer we hear Jesus pray in the garden is a...

## **II. Prayer of Petition.**

A prayer of petition is simply requesting something from God. How is this different from a prayer of intercession? A prayer of intercession is requesting something for someone else. A prayer of petition is asking anything of God – it could be a request for yourself, it could be a request for God to bring revival to the nation or it could be a request for wisdom and guidance. I think we need see that the prayer in the Garden is connected to the prayer of John 17 in the Upper Room. What were the components of the Upper Room prayer?

First, Jesus petitioned God to glorify Himself through His Son AND to give eternal life to all whom He had given to the Son AND to bring the Son home safely when it was all over. Now, in the Garden, Jesus is literally in the waiting room, anticipating His arrest, which will be the beginning of His physical, psychological and spiritual torture in which He will be dragged to the very gates of Hell. His prayer of petition is short (just three sentences long) but very relational, full of emotional truth and repeated three times. Let's consider it.

First, how is it relational? Jesus is coming before His Father with His closest friends. Do you see it?

**They went to a place called Gethsemane, and Jesus said to his disciples, "Sit here while I pray." He took Peter, James and John along with him and he began to be deeply distressed and troubled. Going a little farther, he fell to the ground and prayed that if possible the hour might pass from him. "Abba, Father," he said, "everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will."** (Mark 14:32-33, 35-36)

Jesus did not try to weather this storm alone. Have you ever tried to do that? You don't want to bother anyone or you think it's better just to suffer alone. Friend, it's not. Jesus was depressed, distressed and frightened. He was facing the biggest test of His life on earth. In the movie, *The Passion of the Christ*, at this moment we see Satan in the shadows, whispering tempting thoughts to Jesus. I think that's so accurate. Satan didn't just want Jesus to die, He wanted Him to suffer and die. And He wants the same for you! You might think you're alone when you're depressed, but you aren't. The enemy is there. Do what Jesus did; bring your closest friends into the night with you.

But we also need to see that Jesus prayed to His Father and asked His friends to do the same. There's no greater relationship than the one we have with the Father. But we don't need to go to Him alone all the time. Think about it. When Jesus taught us to pray, He said, "Here's how you should pray, OUR Father..." What does that tell you? It tells me that, most of the time, we should come to Him with our friends.

Secondly, how is this Garden prayer full of emotional truth? Well, we already know that Jesus is emotionally very distressed. Bible commentators Bratcher and Nida, write:

*The two verbs translated "deeply distressed and troubled" together describe an extremely acute emotion, a compound of bewilderment, fear, uncertainty and anxiety, nowhere else portrayed in such vivid terms as here.*<sup>1</sup>

But beneath that negative emotion, I see another equally powerful, positive emotion. In making His petition, His request, what is His greatest concern for Himself? It's not self-preservation but soul-preservation. Do you see it? His petition really isn't that He might avoid the pain but that His soul might be linked with the will of the Father.

Richard Burr, in his book on prayer, writes this:

The most valuable possession we have is our souls, and our primary concern should be for their well-being. "What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul?" (Matt. 16:26) ...The health of our souls determines not only our relationship with God and man but also the effectiveness of our prayers... <sup>2</sup>

Jesus isn't looking forward to physical pain, that's why He asks for that cup to be taken. But He immediately states His higher priority:

**"...Yet not what I will, but what you will."** (Mark 14:36b)

Jesus is requesting of the Father whatever is best for His soul. Is that always your request? When Joni Eareckson Tada became a paraplegic as a teenager, her teenage brain could not imagine living the rest of her life like that. So, she begged God to heal her. When He didn't, she begged God to take her life. When He didn't do that either, she said she prayed what she later came to understand is the most powerful prayer any person can ever pray. She prayed, "O God, if I can't die, then show me how to live." <sup>3</sup>

What's the distress in your life that is so severe that you really can't see how your life going forward could even be tolerable, let alone enjoyable? I urge you to pray this prayer that Joni prayed, "If You won't let me die, then show me how to live." This is a prayer that puts your soul in its rightful place - in God's hands. This is the ultimate petition every one of us should make of God. It's the petition of Jesus Christ. Lastly, we must not miss Jesus'...

### **III. Prayer of Adoration**

It's not flashy, it's not flowery, it's not full of imagery and metaphor. It's part of a three sentence prayer! But it's there! It's Jesus' first sentence. In the Greek it's just six words: "*Abba o pataer, panta dunata soi.*" In English:

**"Abba, (Papa) Father, ...everything is possible for you...."** (Mark 14:36)

In the darkest moment of His life, these words make up the first of three sentences Jesus speaks to His Father. The next sentence is His request and in the last sentence, He says:

**"...Yet not what I will, but what you will."** (Mark 14:36)

What do these words tell you about Jesus' relationship with His Father?

Have you ever seen a very pregnant woman walking with her husband and you just know that it's their first pregnancy? How do you know that? Because the husband is helping her gingerly get in and out of the car. He stops all traffic so she can cross the street at her own speed. He runs to every door to open it, making sure there is a five-foot bubble of safety all around her. Have you ever seen that? How would you describe that? Wouldn't you say, "My goodness, how he adores her!"

Expressing your adoration to God the Father or to Jesus doesn't mean that your prayer is filled with the appropriate number of multi-syllable words. "Omnipotent Majesty, Ye who reigns in royal splendor and effervescent beauty..." No. Adoration comes from the heart. It's built off of trust that has developed over years of daily experiences where, in big and small ways, you tested God and found Him to be trustworthy. Before Jesus was in this garden, staring down a corridor of pain, He had walked slowly through His years, living in a very strange place full of people who meant well but frankly just couldn't keep their promises most of the time. But in those experiences, Jesus learned that His Father was ALWAYS good to His word.

So, when the dark night came, as He knew it would, even then, it was perfectly natural for Him to say:

**“Abba, Father, ...everything is possible for you...”** [In essence, He’s saying, “I know, I remember when you rescued Moses and the people. I’ll never forget David and that giant. I’m thinking right now about Esther and Mordecai and the mess they were in, but you delivered them! Nothing’s too hard for you!”

“But I also remember that Moses wanted to get into the Promised Land and you said, ‘No.’ And David wanted to build the Temple but you said, ‘No.’ And Jonah wanted you to wipe out the people of Nineveh, but you said, ‘No.’ And with all of your ‘No’s,’ your plan was better, it was best. So, You, Abba, not only have my deepest respect, you have my will. Though my future looks bleak and painful, I do trust you. So, **‘...not what I will, but what you will.’** Amen.”

Adoration isn’t primarily certain kinds of words. It’s a deep and certain trust, that the Father will do what is best.

Confession/repentance, petition and adoration: these are also part of the way Jesus prayed. If it’s good enough for Jesus, I think it’s good enough for me. How about you?

[Now, in each of our worship sites, your site pastor will come now to close your service.]

Let’s pray...

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<sup>1</sup> Walt Wessel, *The Expositors Bible Commentary, Vol. 8* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), p. 763

<sup>2</sup> Richard Burr, *Developing Your Secret Closet of Prayer* (Camp Hill: Wing Spread Publishers, 1998), p. 97

<sup>3</sup> Marvin Olasky, “Loving Life,” *World* (1-12-13)