
Were Jesus' Prayers Answered?

"In the days of His flesh, He offered up both prayers and supplications with loud crying and tears to the One able to save Him from death, and He was heard because of His piety" (Hebrews 5:7).

In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus went a short distance from three of His apostles, knelt down, and later fell upon His face before God. He prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; yet not as I will, but as You will" (Matthew 26:39). In the next hour, He returned two more times to this lonely spot and prayed that His Father's will might be accomplished through the great trial that was coming upon Him. The spirit of the last two periods of prayer is encapsulated in His brief petition: "My Father, if this cannot pass away unless I drink it, Your will be done" (Matthew 26:42).

Jesus was the sinless Son of God. Obviously, no one on earth has ever prayed the way He prayed. Moses, Samuel, and Daniel, as fervent and faithful as they were in prayer, could not equal the perfect, sincere praying of Jesus. History has witnessed no other person praying as righteously and as earnestly as Jesus did in the shadows of the olive trees of Gethsemane.

As we listen to His prayers and behold His agony and sorrow, we raise this question: "Were His prayers answered?" If we think only of His request that the "cup" pass from Him, the answer to our question is no. The subsequent history given by all four Gospel Accounts relates Jesus' crucifixion, that is, His drinking of the cup. They tell us of the awful moment when Jesus was separated from His Father as He bore our sins. God did not say yes to this part of His prayer because He could not do so and still provide salvation for the sinful human race.

However, if we think of the spirit of His prayers—the underlying thought of submis-

sion that runs throughout each supplication that He made—we realize that God heard and answered His prayers. This truth is especially brought out in Hebrews 5:7. The writer said, "In the days of His flesh, He offered up both prayers and supplications with loud crying and tears to the One able to save Him from death, and He was heard because of His piety."

The phrase "in the days of His flesh" refers to Jesus' earthly life and ministry. The "loud crying and tears" must be a special reference to His prayers in Gethsemane. The Gospel Accounts do not mention His tears, but they do picture a struggle in the garden—a battle of such dimensions that words cannot describe it. When Jesus knelt to pray, He was greatly troubled, very sorrowful, and almost overcome with grief. The words "loud crying and tears" describe an expressing of the deepest of emotions. "Prayers" are petitions, sincere requests for what is needed; "supplications" are earnest appeals. When we couple "prayers" and "supplications" with the truth that He prayed with "loud crying and tears," we see here one of the most moving scenes in the entire Bible.

Hebrews 5:7 also says, "He was heard because of His piety." Yes, the writer said, Jesus was answered. God saw His piety, His godly fear and reverence for His will, and granted His requests. With some thought, we can see the ways that these answers were given.

First, we notice that He received angelic strengthening. Luke said that, after Jesus' first period of prayer, an angel came and ministered to Him. He wrote, "Now an angel from

heaven appeared to Him, strengthening Him" (Luke 22:43). We do not know for certain the nature of this strengthening, but it must be that Jesus' body was divinely sustained so that He could endure the trial before Him. God was not saving Him *from* death, but He would deliver Him *through* it. God's response to His prayers would be similar to His response to Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego when they were in the fiery furnace (Daniel 3:26). He did not choose to deliver them from the furnace; He chose to sustain them in it. He not only sustained Jesus in His crucifixion, but He also delivered Him from the grave by raising Him from the dead.

In addition, God heard His prayers by preparing Him to face the crucifixion calmly and with divine dignity. No one can read the descriptions of our Lord's conduct during the trials and the crucifixion itself and not be impressed by His flawless behavior. No person in history has ever faced suffering the way Jesus did. No doubt, His divine demeanor helped to convince one of the thieves to recognize Him as the Messiah and persuaded him to ask for a place in His kingdom (Luke 23:42). Jesus' body may have shivered as the cross drew near, but His heart was perfectly yielded to God's will. In response to His garden prayers, God gave Him the inner fortitude and spiritual discernment that His dying ordeal would require.

Further, we see that God granted His request to bring glory to Him. Jesus had earlier said, in what has been called His little Gethsemane, "Now My soul has become troubled; and what shall I say, 'Father, save Me from this hour'? But for this purpose I came to this hour. Father, glorify Your name" (John 12:27, 28a). In response, a voice out of heaven said, "I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again" (John 12:28b). Some people in the crowd around Jesus thought it had thundered, while others thought an angel had spoken to Him (John 12:29). Beyond any physical relief that might be given to Him, more than any escape from personal pain, Jesus sought to bring glory to His Father. He pursued this end in His heart and in His prayers.

Did God hear this part of His prayers? Indeed, He did. As we survey the events of the cross, let us look carefully at how Jesus responded to His enemies, to the tortuous suffering, and to the ridicule and mocking. His words, conduct, and submission brought

eternal glory to His Father.

Also, we see that Jesus' prayers were fulfilled by His Father's will being done. After all, this desire was at the heart of His requests. His prayers were interlaced with the phrase "not My will but Yours be done." He entered the garden with the passion to do God's will, and He left with the same desire. The devil argued with his best logical appeal that such a desire should be discarded, but Jesus continued to pray that God's will might be done. He won the victory over Satan. God answered these prayers by implementing His will through Jesus. God was working out His eternal purpose to offer salvation to the world, and His plan involved the cross. God had no other way to save mankind, and Jesus humbly bowed to His will.

The lessons that come from Jesus' prayers and the answers that God gave to them should be carefully stored away in our hearts. First, they teach us that the underlying desire of our prayers should be for the will of God to be done. His will is not only best for us, but it is also best for the world.

Second, His prayers teach us that what our bodies cry out for and what is really needed may be two different things. Our bodies resist pain and scream for comfort. That is the spirit and character of the physical. Lazarus was sick and no doubt wanted to get well, but was his healing what God's plan required at that time and place? See John 11:4, 15, 25. Jesus did not want to raise someone from a sickness; He sought to raise someone from the dead so that the world might have evidence that God had sent Him. Are we not glad that the glory of God superseded the outcries of the physical?

Third, these prayers teach us that God is faithful to respond in the best possible way to the prayers of the righteous. He is a prayer-hearing God! When righteous people pray, He will not fail them. Let us never forget the words of John: "This is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us" (1 John 5:14).

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True prayer does not seek the will of the one praying; it seeks above all — regardless of cost, time, or personal sacrifice — the will of God.