
The Prayer Jesus Did Not Pray¹

“Or do you think that I cannot appeal to My Father, and He will at once put at My disposal more than twelve legions of angels?” (Matthew 26:53).

Jesus’ arrest was preceded by a long night that had been filled with discussions about prayer and with earnest praying. At the eating of the Passover and at the institution of the commemorative supper, Jesus had prayed with His apostles (Matthew 26:26, 27). In His farewell conversations with the apostles (John 14—16), He had encouraged them to pray. He had said to them,

Whatever you ask in My name, that will I do, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son (John 14:13).

If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you (John 15:7).

In that day you will not question Me about anything. Truly, truly, I say to you, if you ask the Father for anything in My name, He will give it to you (John 16:23).

After these tender exhortations, Jesus had prayed His great high priestly prayer in their presence, just before the group moved to the Garden of Gethsemane (John 17:1–26). In that garden, He had prayed fervently during three separate periods of prayer, beseeching His Father regarding the approaching trial and crucifixion (Matthew 26:39–46).

Sometime after midnight, Jesus emerged from this time of prayer to meet the armed multitude that had come to arrest Him. However, as He gave Himself to them, He made it clear that there was one prayer He would not pray. As the crowd of soldiers took Him into custody, Peter flashed his sword. He struck

a servant named Malchus and cut off his ear. Jesus told His apostles to stop the violence, and He healed Malchus’ ear. His compassionate act calmed the crowd. Then Jesus said to Peter, “Put the sword into the sheath; the cup which the Father has given Me, shall I not drink it?” (John 18:11). Matthew recorded that He also said to him, “Or do you think that I cannot appeal to My Father, and He will at once put at My disposal more than twelve legions of angels?” (Matthew 26:53). *Jesus could have asked His Father to send forth the army of heaven to deliver Him from the trial that He faced, but He would not pray that prayer.*

Our Savior had limitless power at His beck and call. Just one prayer away were all the servants at His Father’s almighty throne. Why would He not call on them? The answer to this question takes us into the heart of Jesus.

His obedient heart would not allow Him to pray that prayer. He had spent considerable time in agonizing prayer that night in the garden, firmly resolving in His heart to fulfill His Father’s will. At least three times, He had said to His Father, “Not as I will, but as You will” (Matthew 26:39c). The devil had engaged Him in the greatest battle of all time to remove that commitment from His heart and tongue. Satan used all of his power to muffle the prayer that Jesus was praying. He brought against Him every argument, every reward, every fear,

¹The title for this lesson was suggested by Stanley D. Schneider, *Facing the Cross* (Columbus, Ohio: Wartburg Press, 1955), 13.

and every threat that he could design; but his mighty barrage did not succeed. Jesus had come to earth with this purpose in mind, and the devil could not prevent Him from completing it. Paul said, "Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross" (Philippians 2:8).

His righteous heart would not allow Him to pray that prayer. He had come to declare God's righteousness in His great sacrifice for sin. Paul said that "God displayed [Jesus] publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith" (Romans 3:25a). He would address the guilt of sin through the cross. As the perfect Son of God, He would offer Himself to be made sin for us "so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Corinthians 5:21). To use the words of John the apostle, "The Son of God appeared for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil" (1 John 3:8b). From the time of the first sin in the Garden of Eden until the cross, sin had, in a sense, reigned. With the shedding of the blood of Jesus, grace through God's righteousness abounds. Anyone who will come to Christ through obedient faith can be forgiven of sin. Jesus, the righteous One, could not pray that God would send His angels to defend Him from this conflict; His righteousness prevented Him from praying such a prayer.

His loving heart would not allow Him to pray that prayer. He came to express to us through His death the Father's love for us. Love demanded that He put us before Himself. He did not merely look on His own personal interests or desires, but He invested Himself in fulfilling the needs of the people of the earth. Paul said that Jesus, "although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant" (Philippians 2:6, 7a). He also said, "But God demonstrates His own

love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). As we watch Jesus approaching the crowd of soldiers and priests, we can only say, "Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13).

One of the cutting criticisms that Jesus heard while He was hanging in that unbearable agony on the cross were these words: "If You are the Son of God, come down from the cross" (Matthew 27:40b). The scribes and the elders also mocked and accused Him, saying, "He saved others; He cannot save Himself. He is the King of Israel; let Him now come down from the cross, and we will believe in Him. He trusts in God; let God rescue Him now, if He delights in Him; for He said, 'I am the Son of God'" (Matthew 27:42, 43). How great is the mystery that these religious leaders did not understand! Jesus was committed to suffering this crucifixion as the divinely appointed sin-offering for the salvation of the world. He could have asked for deliverance at any moment, and the Father would have provided it. All God had to do was to cast one glance toward Calvary, and the crucifixion would have come to a halt. However, Jesus would not pray for deliverance. He was resolved to be our Savior even though He would have to walk through the fires of suffering in order to do so.

Eddie Cloer



Jesus prayed that God's will might be done, and He knew what that would mean. As He arose and went to meet the band of men who were seeking His death, He was determined to see it through to the end. He would not ask for legions of angels to deliver Him, but He would pray for the Father to strengthen Him so that He could stay on the cross and provide salvation for all who would come to Him.