

An Attempt To Listen To God

Meditations on
His Prayers of Intercession
Section 2

By

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The Lord's Intercessory Prayers

In reading the gospels we observe there are recorded at least seven intercessory prayers of the Lord. These are:

- a) At the grave of Lazarus. (Jn. 11:43)
- b) When He wept over Jerusalem: "O Jerusalem . . . how often would I have gathered thy children . . . and ye would not" (Lk. 13:34). While the cry over Jerusalem is not in its core a prayer, it is a plea unveiling the pathos of the heart of the Lord.
- c) In the Garden of Gethsemane when the Lord cried with strong crying and tears. It was concerning that experience, and it is recorded: "He prayed more earnestly" (Lk. 22:44). This was an emotional speaking. This was praying with earnest passion.
- d) In John 17, and the pathos that permeates that prayer is unfathomable.
- e) When on the cross He made intercessions for the transgressors when He prayed: "Father forgive them; for they know not what they do". (Lk. 23:34)
- f) When He prayed for Peter that his faith would not fail. (Lk. 22:32)
- g) When He interceded for Himself. (Heb. 5:7)

His Cry For Forgiveness For Those Who Rejected And Crucified Him (Lk. 23:34)

The uniqueness of this cry:

- a) It is the only cry from the cross in which the Lord prays for the unsaved, but it was not the first time the Lord had prayed for them: "Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word" (Jn. 17:20). How beautifully He prayed, not like us as a grocery list, nor with a mere superficial intellectual knowledge, but in the full awareness of the fresh experience of being subject to the wrath of God and its horror, the fullness of the love of God, the bliss they are rejecting, and He prays in truth.
- c) It is the only one that is an ongoing prayer, for the tense indicates an ongoing petition.
- d) The exemplification of the Lord's own teachings: "Love your enemies . . . do good to them . . . who persecute you" (Matt. 5:44). He does not ask them to forgive them, but to pray for them.
- e) This addresses the greatest need of humanity.
 - i) Forgiveness is based on justice.
- f) It is one of the two cries of our Lord on the cross which are fulfilling of ancient prophecies:
 - i) "He made intercession for the transgressors." (Isa. 53:12)
 - ii) "I thirst." I am not aware of this being a specific scripture. There are some that come close, such as: "They gave me vinegar to drink" (Psa. 69:21). It seems the better interpretation is: "that the scriptures might be fulfilled, Jesus said: "I am thirsty". This by their giving vinegar to Him which He partook of (Jn. 19:28), the scriptures were fulfilled.
- g) The doctrines in this cry are forgiveness, mercy, grace, love, and the foundation for divine relationships.
- h) This intercession is unique, being the only one that by its Greek tense was a repeated petition.
- i) It is the third recorded time when the Lord prays for the unsaved.
 - i) The first was when he prayed over Jerusalem. (Matt. 23:37)
 - ii) Prior to His entry into the garden of Gethsemane. (Jn. 17:1-26)
 - iii) On the cross. (Lk. 23:34)

Then said Jesus, Father forgive them; for they know not what they do. (Lk. 23:34)

The entire clause is in several sections, each word emphasizing a different truth:

- a) The time: "Then"
- b) The verbalization: "Said"
- c) The Person: "Jesus"
- a) The relationship: "Father"
- b) The imploring: "Forgive"
- c) The subjects: "Them"
- d) The explanation: "They know not what they do"

The time “Then”

When the Lord prayed for those who rejected and crucified Him, the Holy Spirit compels us to look at that which had happened for a point of time is signaled: “Then said Jesus” (Lk. 23:34). Consideration must be taken concerning:

- a) What had happened prior to this cry?

It is only as we see the background that we can appreciate the beauty of his prayer: “Father forgive them; for they know not what they do.”

The hymn writer has penned the words:

It was a lonely path He trod,
From every human soul apart;
Known only to Himself and God
Was all the grief that filled His heart,
Yet from the track
He turned not back,
Till where I lay in want and shame,
He found me—Blessed be His name!

Then dawned at last that day of dread,
When desolate, yet undismayed,
With wearied frame and thorn-crowned head,
He, God-forsaken, man-betrayed,
Was then made sin
On Calvary,
And, dying there in grief and shame,
He saved me—Blessed be His name!

When being nailed to that Roman gibbet, with a clear head undimmed by drugging alcohol, and with a spirituality that rose far above earthly animosity or self-pity, the Lord begins to speak. Two matters are indicated:

- a) When He did not ask for their forgiveness.
- b) When He did begin to ask for their forgiveness.

There is no record of the Lord praying for their forgiveness when:

- a) Men had sought to cast Him over the brow of the hill.
- b) Judas had betrayed Him: “Mine old familiar friend, in whom I trusted, (with the money) . . . hath lifted up his heel against me”. (Psa. 41:9)
- c) In the Judgment Hall men cried “crucify”. (Mk. 15:13, 14)
- d) When Peter denied Him three times. (Jn. 13:38)
- e) When He was struck in the face, wicked untruths spoken against him, hounded as a common criminal from Ananis, Caiaphas, Herod, the Sanhedrin, and then being the object of satanic spite and hatred when man called for His crucifixion. (Lk. 22:64; Psa. 35:11 & Matt. 26:60; Jn. 18:13; Lk. 23:11)
- f) When, publicly with two malefactors, He had been led through Jerusalem’s streets. (Matt. 27:31)
- g) Then they came to Calvary and the actual crucifying began, and “Then” He prayed. Why not at these situations?

Two of the hardest things to do is to confess and ask forgiveness immediately after a wrong has been done, and the second is proffering forgiveness to those who hurt you deeply. When we consider the attitudes of those around the cross; the gloating of the Pharisees; the nonchalant attitude of the soldiers; the sorrowing hearts of the ladies and friends; the attitude of the Lord rises like a mountain.

When did He ask for their forgiveness?

- a) When the soldiers and Centurion who were carrying out orders in cold callousness, and in the midst of the actual nailing of His hands and feet. It was then He prayed.
- b) When the chief priests and elders, the Pharisees, scribes, lawyers, and Sadducees as they stoking their beards and spoke among themselves of the rightness of that which they were doing. While perhaps consciences were being pricked, it was then He prayed.
- c) When the disciples who had forsaken him in His hour of darkness, and then Peter's denial, and as they in Jerusalem prepared the morning sacrifice, oblivious to that which was happening outside the city wall. It was then He prayed.
- d) I think perhaps He looked down the ages of time and saw each of us demonstrating the same attitude before and after salvation, causing His sufferings, and it was then He prayed for them. It brings to mind a hymn I heard many years ago:

Up Calvary's mountain, one dreadful morn,
Walked Christ my Saviour, weary and worn;
Facing for sinners death on the cross,
That He might save them from endless loss.

Refrain:

*Blessed Redeemer! Precious Redeemer!
Seems I now see Him on Calvary's tree;
Wounded and bleeding, for sinners pleading,
Blind and unheeding—dying for me!*

“Father forgive them!” thus did He pray,
E'en while His lifeblood flowed fast away;
Praying for sinners while in such woe—
No one but Jesus ever loved so.

Oh, how I love Him, Saviour and Friend,
How can my praises ever find end!
Through years unnumbered on heaven's shore,
My tongue shall praise Him forevermore.
Timeless Truths

The verbalization “Said”

- a) This to me is very beautiful. He did not just think the thoughts of forgiveness for them or they would never have known His thoughts. He verbally asked for their forgiveness, distinctly said it for them to hear. This was not the hoarse whisper of a dying man, gasping out his last words with one bending the ear low to try to catch the words. We are not told the tone in which it was spoken, but we can be sure it was not how He spoke when reprimanding Satan (Matt. 4:10); nor with scathing voice when speaking to the Pharisees (Mk. 3:4; 12:26) but with all the tenderness of a grief filled heart filled with love for those who failed to know that which they were doing.
- b) He saw that the sin which lay at the door, was ready to pounce on them, and in all its fullness to overtake them. (Gen. 4:7)
- c) He saw them as sinning against themselves. (Heb. 12:3)

The Person “Jesus”

When we think of the first time that lovely Name is mentioned to a human in the New testament: “Thou shalt call His Name Jesus: for He shall save His people from their sins.” (Matt. 1:21)

There's a name above all others,
Wonderful to hear, bringing hope and cheer.
It's the lovely name of Jesus,
Evermore the same, what a lovely name.

What a lovely name, the name of Jesus.
Reaching higher far, than the brightest star.
Sweeter than the songs they sing in heaven.
Let the world proclaim, what a lovely name.

**May God grant us good understanding as He, by His Holy Spirit, deigns to guide us into all truth.
John 16:13**

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