

Meditation: PRAYER AND THE CRUCIFIXION

Prayer played a large part in the story of the crucifixion of Jesus, and all of it is instructive for us, not only historically, but also practically. Two prayers that Jesus prayed shortly before his arrest are preserved for us in the gospels. Here is how Mark records one of them:

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. "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death," he said to them. "Stay here and keep watch."

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."

Jesus prayed this same prayer two more times, so great was his distress. After the third time, his demeanor changed completely. He seemed to be in perfect peace, ready to face the hardships as they came. What made the difference? Now he KNEW he was doing his Father's will, and that was his highest concern.

In John 17 we have the prayer in which Jesus asked that glory would come from his travail. Then he prayed for his disciples, and then for future believers, including us! Listen to his concern for us:

"My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one – I in them and you in me – so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.

"Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world."

Jesus even prayed from the cross. First, there was the amazing prayer of forgiveness, when Jesus asked his Father to forgive those who were nailing him to the cross, because they didn't know what they were doing.

There was also his agonizing cry of *"My God, My God! Why have you forsaken me?"* I believe this was at the height of his spiritual and emotional agony, when our sins were laid on him, causing God to look away for a moment.

Finally, there was a beautiful prayer of committal and trust: *"Father, into your hands I commit my spirit."* What a great way to have your life end on earth – with a deep assurance that you will continue living in eternity with God! Remember, Jesus died to make this possible. Believe in him and eternal life is yours!