



Luke 23:32-34

The Perfect Prayer

One morning I stood on the airstrip at Shell Mera waiting for a Missionary Aviation Fellowship plane to take me to a little community deep in the eastern jungle of Ecuador. As I waited another plane, operated by the mission agency, JAARS, landed and taxied up. As it came closer I could see written in bold white letters on the nose of the plane the name, Toña. ”

My mind quickly flashed back to an event that had happened a few years earlier. It occurred one Sunday morning when Dyuvi, the youngest of the killers of the five missionaries on the Palm Beach, Ecuador, announced to the congregation that God had told him to take God's Carving, the Scriptures, to the once-hated, still-feared down-river Waorani (Auca) tribes people. Objections were raised; the service was in an uproar. "They will kill you!" he was told. But Dyuvi calmly replied, "God has told me to go downriver carrying his Carving, and I must do so. If they kill me, it will be like those five men we speared. I will just die and go to heaven, and God will send someone else to tell them as He did for us."

Another young Auca, Toña, volunteered to go with Dyuvi.

On another occasion Toña said that God had told him to visit some Aucas known as the ridge group. ” Everyone was aware of the danger involved. Toña was taken by helicopter and dropped close to his sister's clearing. For two months he taught there; then his two-way radio went dead, and contact was lost. The hearts of the Christians were heavy. Much later we learned that Toña had been hit on the back with an axe and then speared by his cousins. As he was dying he told them, "I love God, and I love all of you, and it is for your sake I am dying."

The prayer of Toña for his people reminds me of another great Christian who gave His life for Christ. He was Stephen a deacon in the early church. He was a man who was filled with the Spirit. He preached a powerful Spirit-filled sermon to a group of Jewish leaders who came deeply under conviction of their sin and unbelief. But instead of turning from their evil heart and putting their faith in Christ they began gnashing their teeth at him. ”Being full of the Spirit, he gazed intently into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God; and he said, Behold, I see the heavens opened up and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God. ”The effect upon those standing there listening to Stephen was profound. They cried out with a loud voice, and covered their ears, and they rushed upon him with one impulse. And when they had driven him out of the city, they began stoning him . . . until he was dead. They kept on stoning Stephen as he called upon the Lord Jesus and said, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit! And falling on his knees, he cried out with a loud voice, Lord, do not hold this sin against them! ”

Think with me for a few minutes about the perfect prayer and the perfect place of prayer.

place of prayer.

THE PERFECT PLACE OF PRAYER

Most of us have a special place where we like to get away from all the clutter and spend time with our Lord. Jesus had his special places.

Christ prayed on the mountainside

We find Him praying in the solitude of the mountainside. He had just healed a man on the Sabbath. As usual it had infuriated the Pharisees and scribes who had been watching Him to accuse Him. Seeing the man healed they were filled with rage and discussed together what they might do with Jesus (Luke 6:10-11). Luke tells us, "And it was at this time that He went off to the mountain to pray and He spent the whole night in prayer to God (v. 12). The decision that rested upon His shoulders at this time in His ministry would affect the kingdom of God. It was no fleeting moment. It was a night of prayer seeking the will of the Father.

When day came, Luke tells us, "He called His disciples to Him; and chose twelve of them, who He also named as apostles."

Jesus prayed. He spent all night in prayer before making great decisions. Should we not do likewise? We need wisdom that God alone can give us in many of the decisions we make in life.

Not only did Jesus pray all night in the mountains before making decisions, I find Him praying before He taught His disciples great truths that affect the kingdom of God. According to Luke Jesus had just fed five thousand men, and who knows how many women and children were there. It was His answer to some tightwad disciples who said, "We can't afford it, Lord!" He fed the thousands until they were completely satisfied, and when I get to heaven I'm going to find out what they did with the twelve large-sized baskets of leftovers.

Jesus finally got off by Himself to spend some time alone. Again Luke tells us in 9:18, "And it came about that while He was praying alone, the disciples were with Him, and He questioned them, saying, 'Who do the multitudes say that I am?' I imagine that He was praying silently as He was asking them that question.

They began to respond to Him, "John the Baptist, 'Elijah, or one of the other great prophets.

Then Jesus, perhaps holding His breathe, asked, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter jumped on that question saying, "The Messiah of God. You are the Christ, the Anointed of God.

If Jesus, the Son of God, prayed alone as part of His preparation before teaching great truths, should we not do likewise?

teaching great truths, should we not do likewise?

Christ prayed on Mt. Transfiguration

One of my favorite places where I find Jesus praying is on the Mount of Transfiguration in Luke 9:28-29. It was a week after Jesus had revealed this great truth about Himself and testing His disciples that He took with Him Peter, James and John up on the mountainside to pray. That was the intended purpose, to pray. "And while He was praying, the appearance of His face became different, and His clothing became white and gleaming. He was changed right there before their very eyes as He prayed. Christ changed from humiliation to the glory of His deity. They were in the presence of God, as they had never experienced before. The Shekinah glory of God hovered over them. Then Moses and Elijah appeared to them talking with Jesus. Years later Peter could still see the glory of God when he wrote of Him saying, We were eyewitnesses of His majesty. We heard the Majestic Glory say, This is My beloved Son with whom I am well-pleased (2 Peter 1:16-17). Oh, what would happen in our lives and the life of our church if we spent time alone praying as Jesus prayed?

Christ prayed on Mt. Olives

There is another place where I find Jesus praying. In deed, it was His custom to go to the Mount of Olives. I think in those last weeks it was His custom to go there to pray. He knew what was coming. Luke tells us, And when He arrived at the place, He said to them, Pray that you may not enter into temptation. And He withdrew from them a stone's throw, and He knelt down and began to pray. . . (Luke 22:39-41). Ah, here is the perfect place to pray and with a group of men dedicated to that purpose! They fell asleep on Him. They were weary and tired. They couldn't keep their eyes open.

Jesus began praying, Father, if Thou art willing, remove this cup from Me; yet not My will, but Thine be done (v. 42). Your will Father, not mine! Not my will, Your will!

It was not a beautiful mountain top retreat experience. It was the Son of God praying for yours and my eternal destiny. The cup of the wrath of God was before Him. A messenger from heaven appeared to Him strengthening Him. "And being in agony He was praying very fervently; and His sweat became like drops of blood, falling down upon the ground (vv. 43-44).

There His faithful companions were, dead asleep. They were sleeping from sorrow. They were emotionally and spiritually exhausted. They were in spiritual danger and did not comprehend it. Jesus had been teaching them that He was going to die and they couldn't handle it. Jesus needed their encouragement in prayer. They needed to pray fervently that they would not enter into temptation because they would before the night was over. Pray, asking God to keep temptation away. Three times Jesus prayed that intense prayer as the spiritual battle raged. Three times He found them asleep.

Why are you sleeping? Rise and pray that you may not enter into temptation (v. 46). And then we are told that while He was still speaking, behold, a multitude came, and the one called Judas, one of the twelve, was preceding them; and he approached Jesus to kiss Him (v. 47).

If the Son of God found strength in prayer in the greatest moment of trial and temptation should not His disciples tremble before God in prayer? Do we pray for spiritual strength until we bleed? To what extent do we resist temptation?

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Perfect places of prayer, are they not? A beautiful mountainside, praying the night through in the presence of God, surrounded with the Shekinah presence of God, a beautiful garden for prayer overlooking a beautiful city at night. Are these not perfect places to bow in the Father's presence?

Yet, I find another place where Christ prayed. We have three recorded prayers while He hung on the cross.

Christ prayed on Mt. Calvary

Let's reverently bow before that horrible scene. There are three crosses and three men hanging on them. Christ was hanging on the center cross because they considered Him to be the worst of the three criminals. The crucifixion was designed by depraved minds to make death as painful as possible. The Romans borrowed it from the cruel Carthaginians and then refined it as a means of capital punishment. The idea was to display in public what would happen to you if you defied the Roman government. It was the most agonizing and shameful form of execution ever devised by man. It was so cruel that the Romans only used it for slaves and criminals of the lowest type. No Roman citizen was ever allowed to be crucified. It was not unusual for the victims on the crosses to be frenzied with pain, to shriek and curse and spit on the spectators below them.

Two other men, criminals, literally evil ones, were also being led away to be put to death with Jesus. And when they came to the place called The Skull, there they crucified Him and the criminals, one on the right and the other on the left (Luke 23:32-33).

They were first stripped of every possession in life. At the cross Jesus was robbed of everything He possessed: His honor, His followers, His life, His family, even the last remnant of His earthly possessions, His clothing. He was naked before the watching world. He became absolutely poor, that we might become exceedingly rich. The apostle Paul stated it correctly, For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich (2 Corinthians 8:9).

It is here that we find the perfect place of prayer. A. T. Robertson said, It is certain Jesus spoke these words for they are utterly unlike anyone else! They do not fit the lips of anyone else. The Son of God was praying from the cross! This is the perfect place of prayer.

It is there that we also find the perfect petition of prayer.

THE PERFECT PETITION OF PRAYER

But Jesus was saying: Father forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing (Luke 23:34).

Jesus was conscious of a perfect relationship with His Father

James Stalker in his *Life of Christ* wrote, The word Father proved that the faith of Jesus was unshaken by all through which He passed and by that which He was now enduring. . . . When the fortunes of Jesus were at the blackest, when He was baited by a raging pack of wolf-like enemies, and when He was sinking into unplumbed abysses of pain and desertion, He still said, Father. ”

The word Father implies an intimate love relationship of trust. We are reminded of the words of Job,

Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him (13:15). I will trust Him and fear not. Perfect love casts out all fear.

Jesus was conscious of His redemptive responsibility on the cross

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Jesus does not pray, Fāther forgive Me. He was aware that He was the spotless Lamb of God, without blemish, offering Himself up as the perfect sacrifice for the sin of the world. He was acutely aware of His purpose of dying on the cross. He was making it possible for the Father to forgive sinners.

To some arrogant, selfish disciples Jesus had said earlier, Fōr even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many (Mark 10:45). Now Jesus was dying as that ransom paid to set men free. Jesus gave His own life as the price of freedom for the slaves of sin. Even on the cross Jesus is fully conscious of the significance of His death for men. Fāther forgive them, ānd condemn Me. He was dying as our substitute.

It was not a prayer shot at random into the Jewish sky. Jēsus kept praying. The expression, Jēsus was saying, māy best be translated, Jēsus kept saying. The verb is imperfect indicating continuous action in past. The Greek scholar A. T. Robertson translates, Then Jesus was saying. So translates Kenneth Wuest and Knox, And Jesus was saying. Roterham says, Or kept saying, Montgomery's translation reads, Jēsus kept saying. Therefore, Jesus kept saying over and over again, Fāther forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing. ”

Russell Jones makes excellent application of this great truth in *Gold from Golgotha*. When Jesus arrived at the place of the crucifixion He prayed, Fāther, forgive them; for they know not what they do. As the Roman soldiers nailed Him to the crossbeam He prayed, Fāther forgive them; for they know not what they do. As the rusty nails pierced His wrists He prayed, Fāther forgive them; for they know not what they do. As they lifted Him up to the upright He prayed, Fāther forgive them; for they know not what they do. As the crowd gathered and hurled insults and cursed Him He prayed, Fāther forgive them; for they know not what they do. No one knows how many times Jesus prayed that prayer that afternoon from the cross.

Moreover, not only was Christ paying for the soldiers and the people that dreadful day, but He was also praying for you and me while He died on the cross. Take that list of sins in Romans chapter one and apply them to the cross. Take the sins you have committed this week and take them to the cross. Take every sin you have ever committed to Him. Name them off one by one.

Fāther forgive them; for they know not what they do w̄hen they commit all kinds of ũfrighteousness. ”
Fāther forgive them; for they know not what they do w̄hen they are w̄icked. ”Fāther forgive them; for they do not know what they do w̄hen they are filled with ḡreed. ”Fāther forgive them w̄hen they are filled with n̄falice. ”Fāther forgive them w̄hen they are f̄ull of envy. ”Fāther forgive them; for they do not know what they do w̄hen they commit n̄murder. ”Fāther forgive them w̄hen they are full of s̄trife. ”
Fāther forgive them w̄hen they are full of d̄ceit. ”Fāther forgive them; for they do not what they do when they are full of n̄falice. ”

Take each one of these sins listed in Romans 1:28-31 and bring them to the cross. Gossip, slanders, haters of God, insolent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, without understanding, untrustworthy, unloving, unmerciful –hear Jesus praying, Fāther forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing! ”

No one ever prayed like Jesus prayed. He was and is interceding for you and me today.

Alexander Maclaren said, The dying Christ prayed for His enemies; the glorified Christ lives to make intercession for us. ”

Jesus prayed the perfect petition from the perfect place of prayer. He prayed for you and me.

THE PERFECT PLEA OF THE PERFECT PRAYER

Jesus did not pray, "Father, forgive Me." Jesus was praying, "Father forgive them and condemn Me." "

God's forgiveness is real

The word *fōrgive* means to cancel, remit, pardon, divine forgiveness. The verb form of the word in the original (*aphieumi*) means *tō* send from one's self. The idea is to put something away. It is the undeserved release of a man from something that might justly have been inflicted upon him or exacted from him. Man is a sinner and under condemnation because *tē* wages of sin is death. He is guilty in the sight of a righteous God. God declares the believing sinner acquitted based upon the death of Christ. The believing sinner's sins are forgiven. Through the death of Jesus God has completely removed the cause of offence. The vicarious and propitiatory sacrifice of Christ takes away the guilt; hence God forgives based upon that sacrifice. The apostle Paul said in Ephesians 1:7, *Iñ* Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace which He lavished on us. At Calvary God put away the guilt of our sin by assuming the guilt and paying the penalty in full. In this manner God's justice was satisfied.

In Colossians 1:13-14, the apostle Paul says, *Fōr* He [the Father] delivered us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. God at Calvary paid the penalty of human sin, thus satisfying the just demands of His holy law; putting away sin and bidding it go away. This was symbolized in the Old Testament by the goat, laden with the sins of Israel, being led away into the wilderness and lost. Israel never saw that goat again, and thus never saw its sins again.

1 John 1:9 tells us, *Iñ* we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. When the Lord Jesus died on the Cross all sin was remitted, paid for, put away on the basis of the satisfaction offered for the demands of God's holy law which sinners broke. The law was satisfied. All the sins the believer commits, including the past in his unsaved condition, and future in his saved state, were put away on a legal basis at the Cross, and are in that sense forgiven the moment he places his faith in the Lord Jesus. But the forgiveness spoken of here has to do, not primarily with the breaking of God's law, for that was taken care of at the Cross and recognized as such at the time the sinner placed his faith in the Savior. Therefore, sin in a Christian's life is a matter, not between a lawbreaker and a judge, but between a child and his father. It is a matter of grieving the Father's heart when a child of God sins. The putting away of the believer's sin upon confession is therefore a forgiveness granted by the Father and a restoration to the fellowship that was broken by that sin. When the saint confesses immediately after the commission of that sin, fellowship is not broken except for that time in which the sin was committed.

Not only does God forgive the believer, but John tells us God also cleanses him from the defilement which he incurred in committing that act of sin. Here the verb *tō* cleanse speaks of a single act of cleansing, for known sin in the life of a saint is not habitual, but the out of the ordinary thing.

God holds us accountable for our sins

The apostle Paul made it very clear that every individual is responsible for his or her sinful behavior and unbelief. We live in a day in which the blame game is in vogue. However, the LORD God tells us, "The soul that sins will surely die and *tē* wages of sin is death. . . There's blood on our hands and we are guilty.

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God dealt with our sins at the cross

Jesus was dying for you and me on that cross. According to God's Law all things are cleansed with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no forgiveness. God could not forgive unless the blood was shed. That is why Jesus was suffering on the cross. For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. . . God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us (Romans 5:6, 8). Christ has done everything that needs to be done for God to forgive you and me of our sins and cleanse us.

God had dealt with our wrong doing in such a way that the sinner, who appropriates the Lord Jesus as Savior, has his sins put away. They are put away on a judicial basis by the out-poured blood of Christ. He paid the penalty the broken law required, and thus satisfied divine justice. Moreover, on the basis of Christ's death, God removes the guilt of that sin from the believing sinner and bestows a positive righteousness, Jesus Christ Himself, in whom this person stands justified forever (2 Cor. 5:21).

Believe on Christ as your personal Savior

God in His amazing grace has done everything that is necessary for Him to save us. Now all that we must do is believe on Christ. He invites us to receive Him as our Savior. The apostle Paul tells us, that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation. . . for WHOEVER WILL CALL ON THE NAME OF THE LORD WILL BE SAVED (Romans 10:9, 10, 13).

Jesus said, Therefore everyone who confesses Me before men, I will also confess him before My Father who is in heaven. But whoever denies Me before men, I will also deny him before My Father who is in heaven. The apostle John stated what we must do clearly, But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God (John 1:12-13).

There is no other name upon which we may call to receive eternal life. The apostle Peter made that clear when he preached in Jerusalem, And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved (Acts 4:12).

God is ready to forgive you right now

If you will take God at His word and confess to Him your need of Christ as your Savior and believe on Him He will forgive you of every sin you have ever committed and give you the assurance of eternal life.

The very moment you believe on Christ God gives you a deep, deep sense of peace and forgiveness. He cleanses your heart of all guilt and sets you free. To everyone who believes on Christ there is this promise, Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:1). He also says, Therefore having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand; and we exult in hope of the glory of God (5:1-2).

The dying thief rejoiced to see

The dying thief rejoiced to see
That fountain in His day,
And there may I though vile as he
Wash all my sins away.

That is what Jesus Christ did for us on the cross. He died in our place and bore our punishment in our stead. The price for our sin debt has been paid in full. There is no other name upon which you can call for salvation. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved. ”

Jesus Christ still stands with arms stretched wide open to us and prays, Fàther forgive them . . . The heavenly Father can forgive us because of what Jesus did for us on the cross.

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