

Introduction

Jesus' prayer in the garden raises several questions:

- a) What was the cup that Jesus' prayed about, and what did He mean for it to pass or be removed?
- b) Did Jesus want something different from His Father when He prayed?
- c) What was the purpose behind Jesus' prayer?

Here are some views on the Gethsemane prayer:

- a) Jesus was born a human being and therefore had the same weaknesses that all people have
- b) The human part of Jesus was weak and wanted to avoid the cross (just like we would)
- c) Although Jesus was ultimately willing to submit to the Father's will, He would have preferred not to

We are going to consider the questions raised, and whether these views are correct.

This all matters for two main reasons:

- a) Our answers affect our view of Jesus, His nature and character
- b) Our answers affect the significance we attach to Jesus' prayer

2. Reviewing the events in Gethsemane

Mt 26:36-46

Mk 14:22-42

Lk 22:39-46

Each account adds a different set of information to the total picture of what happened, as we will see.

3. So what was the cup that Jesus prayed about, and what did He mean when He asked for it to pass?

Many think it was the cross – but was it?

- a) What does the Bible say?

In Mk 14:36 tells us some of the words in Jesus' prayer.

But the verse before he gives us an insight into what Jesus was praying about when he prayed about the cup:

And He went a little beyond them, and fell to the ground and began to pray that if it were possible, the hour might pass Him by.

The word "pass" or "pass by" is *parerchomai*, used in Mk 6:48 when Jesus walked on water and would have passed them by.

Notice that "the hour" is mentioned again when Jesus was disappointed that Peter could not stay awake to watch for one hour (Mk 14:37).

And a little later "the hour" was said to have come (Mk 14:41) when the temple guards come to arrest Him.

So the “hour” that Jesus asked the Father to pass Him by was the time in Gethsemane before His arrest.

- b) What was happening in that “hour” so that Jesus wanted it to pass by?
 - i) Jesus experienced grief to the point of death (Mt 26:38 and Mk 14:34)
 - ii) Jesus was in agony and sweat drops of blood as He prayed (Lk 22:44)

Jesus was therefore already close to death even before the scourging, much less the crucifixion. This is an important fact to remember as we continue to explore these questions.

4. So let’s consider whether Jesus wanted something different from the Father

- a) A foundational principle about the relationship between Jesus and the Father is found in Jn 10:30. “I and the Father are One.” This principle teaches that they are united. They are two divine beings with a common character, purpose and action that unites them.
- b) The Gethsemane prayer also shows that Jesus repeated three times that He wanted the Father’s will to be done, not His own.
- c) Finally, Jesus’ prayer “if it be possible” (Mt 26:39) implied that it may have been possible to accomplish the Father’s will in more than one way.

This provides an explanation for what some have seen as a conflict of wills between Father and Son. This was not a conflict of wills, but different ways to achieve a common purpose.

5. What then was the purpose behind Jesus’ prayer?

- a) Start by looking at what we know from *before* the Gethsemane prayer:
 - i) Jesus rebuked Peter for telling Jesus that He would never die on the cross (Mt16:21-23)
 - ii) Immediately before Gethsemane, Jesus was completely certain about the coming events – His betrayal, the scattering of the disciples and His resurrection after His death

If Jesus actually desired to avoid the cross in His Gethsemane prayer, then He rebuked Peter for wanting the very same thing for Him. Jesus even called Peter Satan for saying these things.

If Jesus actually desired to avoid the cross, then He was no better than Peter who was certain about dying for Christ and then wanting to run away (and doing so).

- b) Next we need to consider more of the Bible’s own commentary on this event:

Jesus’ Gethsemane prayer is almost certainly the subject of Heb 5:7

- i) Jesus prayed with loud cries and tears – consistent with the intensity in Gethsemane (we see no other similarly intense examples of Jesus’ prayer)

- ii) The Father is said to be “able to save Him from death” - implying that this was why Jesus was praying to Him
- iii) Jesus’ prayer was heard = answered (Lk1:13)

But Jesus was *not* saved from death if this prayer was about death on the cross.

Yet the prayer *was* answered, so Jesus must have been saved from some other death.

What death was that? – death in Gethsemane.

- i) Jesus was sorrowful and in agony to the point of death.
- ii) He was so weak that Simon had to carry His cross (Lk 23:26)
- iii) He was so weak that He died on the cross far sooner than most (Mk 15:44)
- iv) Jesus says “the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak”

Jesus prayer was therefore for the Father to save Him from a premature death in the garden before He was able to go to the cross.

Heb 5:7 tells us that God answered that prayer and sent an angel to strengthen Him (Lk22:43).

All three gospel accounts show Jesus gravely distressed to the point of death at the start of His prayers, but calm and no longer grieved by the time of His arrest. He made it through the Gethsemane hour.

6. Let’s put Gethsemane into a broader context

Jesus came to earth to fulfill a mission from the Father that was planned from before the creation of the earth:

- i) Jesus’ death on the cross was by the Father’s “determined counsel and foreknowledge” (Acts 2:23)
- ii) Jesus was the “Lamb slain before the foundation of the world” (Rev 13:8)
- iii) Jesus knew His blood was to be shed because the Father had “foreordained (it) before the foundation of the world” (1Pet 1:18-20)

Seen from the perspective of the eternal purpose of the Father, can we really be so presumptuous as to assume that Jesus wanted to back out of the plan in Gethsemane?

No – Jesus was *not* praying to be saved from death *on* the cross, but to be saved from death *before* the cross.

Conclusions

1. The purpose of Jesus' Gethsemane prayer is the exact opposite of what may think.

He prayed for His life in the garden so that He could die on the cross.

2. Jesus' prayer demonstrates in a new dimension just how far He was prepared to go provide us with the Father's forgiveness from sins.

When Jesus' physical human weakness could have given Him the opportunity to avoid the agonies of the cross, Jesus was determined that He should live just a while longer so that He could suffer fully for us.

3. We must never mistake Jesus' physical weakness for spiritual and moral weakness. He was perfect spiritually while on earth, and the Gethsemane prayer only emphasizes that fact. We must not impute our own human weakness of spirit to Jesus when He was in the garden.
4. In the end, Jesus' prayer in Gethsemane was not about Him, it was really about us – and how we could be saved.