Christ’s Three Prayers

Intro: The synoptic record three short but fervent prayers of Jesus immediately prior to His betrayal and crucifixion. All prayers express the same idea. For our study, we will consider Matthew’s account:

Mat. 26:36-46 “36 Then cometh Jesus with them unto a place called Gethsemane, and saith unto the disciples, Sit ye here, while I go and pray yonder. 37 And he took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be sorrowful and very heavy. 38 Then saith he unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death: tarry ye here, and watch with me. 39 And he went a little further, and fell on his face, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt. 40 And he went away again the second time, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if this cup may not pass away from me, except I drink it, thy will be done. 41 He went away again, and fell on his face, and prayed the third time, saying the same words. 42 Then cometh he to his disciples, and saith unto them, Sleep on now, and take your rest: behold, the hour is at hand, and the Son of man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. 43 Rise, let us be going: behold, he is at hand that doth betray me.”

I. THE COMMON APPLICATION OF THESE PRAYERS

A. Christ
   1. Having human sympathies, became man, feeling as man, dreading the ordeal of the cross, dreading death itself, fearful of the torment that He was going to pass, prayed to His Father not to die the death of the cross
   2. Even then He prayed if it by Thy will.
   3. Notice some difficulties with this application.

B. It contradicts so many things in Christ’s life.

C. Why would Jesus pray something He knew to be contrary to His Father’s will?
   1. If it be possible let it be this way, never-the-less Thy will be done.
   2. Does that mean I can knowingly pray something that I have no doubt is contrary to the Father’s will, and then make it alright by saying whatever you want in the matter.
   3. It does not ring true according to the teaching of the New Testament.

D. Christ is our example.
   1. Would He fear death (cf., Psa. 23:4 “4 Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me”).
   2. Would He fear suffering for righteousness sake; Mat. 5:10-12 “10 Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness’ sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. 11 Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. 12 Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.”

II. SOME PASSAGES TO CONSIDER.

A. Mat. 16:21-23 “21 From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day. 22 Then Peter took him, and began to rebuke him, saying, Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee. 23 But he turned, and said unto Peter, Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men.”
   1. Jesus shows His disciples what was going to happen.
   2. In Peter’s trying to set aside this that was going to come about concerning Christ death and resurrection, Jesus says:
      a. This sentiment is of Satan and not of God.
b. This sentiment is an offence unto Him
c. Peter did not know the things of God.

B. Mat. 20:17-19 “17 And Jesus going up to Jerusalem took the twelve disciples apart in the way, and said unto
them, 18 Behold, we go up to Jerusalem; and the Son of man shall be betrayed unto the chief priests and unto
the scribes, and they shall condemn him to death, 19 And shall deliver him to the Gentiles to mock, and to
scourge, and to crucify him: and the third day he shall rise again.”
1. Jesus in going to Jerusalem knew what was going to take place.
2. There is no effort on Christ part to circumvent it.

C. Luke 9:51 “51 And it came to pass, when the time was come that he should be received up, he stedfastly set
his face to go to Jerusalem,”
1. Knowing what was going to take place, he had no desire to change what would be but
rather steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem.
2. He was determined to let it come to pass.

D. Luke 12:50 “50 But I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how am I straitened till it be accomplished!”
1. The baptism He speaks of is a baptism of suffering having reference to His crucifixion
and death.
2. He says I am straitened (in a difficult position) till it be accomplished. He was desirous
of accomplishing it, and worked toward it.

E. John 12:27 “27 Now is my soul troubled; and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour: but for this
cause came I unto this hour.”
1. This is in the shadow of the cross. His soul was troubled, with what? Before His disciples
can answer He gives them the answer.
2. Shall I say, Father save me from this hour? No that is not is what is troubling my soul,
for this cause I came unto this hour.
3. Why was His soul troubled?
   a. Luke 9:51 “51 And it came to pass, when the time was come that he should be received up, he
   stedfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem,”
   b. He was desirous to accomplish His mission in life, to get it over with.
4. He says he will not pray Father save me from this hour.

F. John 18:11 “11 Then said Jesus unto Peter, Put up thy sword into the sheath: the cup which my Father hath
given me, shall I not drink it?”
1. Christ condemns Peter for trying to offset that hour of death. Peter was trying to deliver
   Him.
2. Christ says shall I not drink this cup my Father has given me.
3. My Father’s will is for me to shed my blood on the cross for the sins of the world, shall
   I not do it? The answer is obvious: Yes I must drink the cup.

G. Mat. 26:50-56 “50 And Jesus said unto him, Friend, wherefore art thou come? Then came they, and laid
hands on Jesus, and took him. 51 And, behold, one of them which were with Jesus stretched out his hand, and
drew his sword, and struck a servant of the high priest’s, and smote off his ear. 52 Then said Jesus unto him, Put
up again thy sword into his place: for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword. 53 Thinkest thou
that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels? 54 But
how then shall the scriptures be fulfilled, that thus it must be? 55 In that same hour said Jesus to the multitudes,
Are ye come out as against a thief with swords and staves for to take me? I sat daily with you teaching in the
temple, and ye laid no hold on me. 56 But all this was done, that the scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled.
Then all the disciples forsook him, and fled.” Jesus had no doubt of the purpose for His death,
and had no desire to be delivered from it.
III. HEB. 5:7 “7 Who in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared;”

A. A divine commentary (Spirit-filled interpretation.)
B. Everyone is in agreement that this refers to these three prayers in Matthew 26.
C. Prayers are askings; supplications are pleadings.
D. “Save him from death;” *from* is the Greek word ἐκ (ek). It is not the Greek word ἀπό (apo).
   1. ἀπό (apo) means from the edge of.
   2. ἐκ (ek) means out from within.
   3. He prayed to the one who was able to save him not from death or from the edge of death or from death itself (as this would be contrary to the Father’s will, the Son’s will and the Spirit’s will): but ἐκ (ek), out from within death.
   4. In other words Christ had already died and now he can be delivered out from within death. Christ prayer is for the resurrection.
E. “And was heard”
   1. *Heard* is from the Greek word εἰσακούω (eisakouo).
      a. It means received or accepted, not physically heard His prayer, but God accepted His prayer, or answered it.
      b. God did what Christ prayed for; He answered the prayer favorable.
   2. God would not receive (εἰσακούω, eisakouo) a prayer that was knowingly contradictory to His will (save me from death itself).
   3. God did receive Christ prayer because it was in harmony with His will.
F. The reason God heard or did what Christ prayed for is because He feared.
   1. *Fear* comes from the Greek word εὐλαβεία (eulabeia).
      a. It means to reverence or respecting God’s will.
      b. It is obeying the Father’s word.
   2. Christ was respecting the Father’s will in dying upon the cross, thus the Father accepted the prayer of Christ.
G. God heard his prayer because of His reverencing God’s word. What did he do? He did not save him from death itself; He saved him out from within death. He raised Christ from the dead.
   1. The reason God raised Him from the dead, and showed Him to be the Savior of the world; is because Christ reverenced God’s will.
   2. If He had not reverenced His will; then Christ would never have been brought out from within death, He would have stayed in the grave.
H. This is consistent with John 17:1-5 “1 These words spake Jesus, and lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, Father, the hour is come; glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee: 2 As thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him. 3 And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent. 4 I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do. 5 And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was.”
   1. His hour is now upon Him.
      a. That hour is his glorification.
b. John 13:1 “Now before the feast of the passover, when Jesus knew that his hour was come that he should depart out of this world unto the Father, having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end.”

2. Christ glorified the Father.
   a. He lived in obedience to the will of the Father.
   b. He feared: εὐλαϐεία (eulabeia).
   c. He finished the work the Father gave Him.
      (1) That work was to give eternal life.
      (2) The way He would give eternal life is by dying the death of the cross (which would glorify the Father).
   d. A. T. Robertson writes, “I glorified thee on the earth (ἐγὼ σε ἐδοξάσα ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς [egō se edoxasa epi tēs gēs]). Verse 3 is parenthetical and so verse 4 goes on after verse 2. He had prayed for further glorification. Having accomplished (τελειώσας [teleiōsas]). First aorist active participle of τελειοώ [teleioō], old verb from τελειός [teleios] (perfect). Used in 4:34 by Jesus with τὸ ἑργὸν [to ergon] as here. That was Christ’s “food” (βρώμα [brōma]) and joy. Now as he faces death he has no sense of failure as some modern critics say, but rather fulness of attainment as in 19:30 (τετελεσται [tetelestai]). Christ does not die as a disappointed man, but as the successful messenger, apostle (ἀπεστείλας [apesteilās], verse 3) of the Father to men.”

3. Because He glorified the Father, His prayer is for the Father to glorify Him.
   a. How?
   b. By raising Him from the dead.
      (1) This would bring to Christ the glory He had with the Father before the beginning of the world.
      (2) Rom. 1:4 “And declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead.”

IV. MATTHEW 26:36-46 — THE THREE PRAYERS
   A. “If it by possible”
      1. Was it possible for Jesus not to die?
      2. From a physical standpoint, it was.
      3. It was not possible:
         a. From the will of God or the will of Christ.
         b. If man was to be saved, which is why Christ came into the world.
   B. “Not as I will”
      1. What was Christ will?
      2. It was to die the death of the cross, and He was determined to die that death.
   C. “But as thou wilt.” It was the Father’s will for him to die on the cross.
      1. Could Jesus have prayed this prayer, and it been harmonious in any way with that which was possible, that which was the Father’s will or that which was His will, if He were praying not to die the death of the cross?
         a. The answer is of course, “no.”
         b. So, what we would have is a prayer that Christ says:
            (1) It is the sentiment of Satan rather than God.
2. **The answer lies in Heb. 5:7** "Who in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared;"

   a. Christ prayer was for the resurrection.
   b. Thus Christ was delivered out from within death, He was raised.
   c. This makes Christ three prayers harmonious to the rest of scripture.

(1) John 4:34 “Jesus saith unto them, My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work.”
(2) John 5:19, 30 “Then answered Jesus and said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do: for what things soever he doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise…. I can of mine own self do nothing: as I hear, I judge: and my judgment is just; because I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me.”
(3) John 6:38 “For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me.”
(4) Mat. 26:37-46 “And he took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be sorrowful and very heavy. Then saith he unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death: tarry ye here, and watch with me. And he went a little further, and fell on his face, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt. And he cometh unto the disciples, and findeth them asleep, and saith unto Peter, What, could ye not watch with me one hour? Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak. He went away again the second time, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if this cup may not pass away from me, except I drink it, thy will be done. And he came and found them asleep again: for their eyes were heavy. And he left them, and went away again, and prayed the third time, saying the same words. Then cometh he to his disciples, and saith unto them, Sleep on now, and take your rest: behold, the hour is at hand, and the Son of man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise, let us be going: behold, he is at hand that doth betray me.”

D. “Let this cup pass from me”

1. The cup is death.
2. Where is the emphasis to be placed?
   a. “Let this CUP pass from me.” No. This gives a false concept, contrary to the Father’s will, Christ will, and Heb. 5:7 “Who in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared;”
   b. Instead the emphasis should be placed, “let this cup PASS from me.” Let it depart from me.
3. Not, let me not die the death of the cross; but let that death that I die pass from me, or let me be raised from the dead.

E. “Nevertheless not as I will but Thou wilt.”

1. It was Christ will that he be raised from the dead.
2. Was it the Father’s will that Christ be raised from the dead? Yes.
3. Then why is it given in the conditional sense?
   a. All through the New Testament the life of our Lord, and his acceptance by the Father, His being Savior of the world, is put in the conditional frame or presentation.
(1) John 12:32 “32 And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me.”
   (a) Why the conditional “if.”
   (b) Because it all depended.

(2) John 13:32 “32 If God be glorified in him, God shall also glorify him in himself, and shall straightway glorify him.” Has the conditional “if” in relation to Jesus glorifying God on the earth.

(3) 2 Sam. 7:12-17 “12 And when thy days be fulfilled, and thou shalt sleep with thy fathers, I will set up thy seed after thee, which shall proceed out of thy bowels, and I will establish his kingdom. 13 He shall build an house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom for ever. 14 I will be his father, and he shall be my son. If he commit iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men, and with the stripes of the children of men: 15 But my mercy shall not depart away from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away before thee. 16 And thine house and thy kingdom shall be established for ever before thee: thy throne shall be established for ever. 17 According to all these words, and according to all this vision, so did Nathan speak unto David.”
   (a) “If he commit iniquity.”
   (b) Was there that possibility? Not if He was God, which is what proves Him to be God.
   (c) If He commits iniquity, I will reject Him.

(4) This is the conflict of the ages, is He the Son of God, is He the Christ, is He God manifest in the flesh, is He the Savior of the world?
   (a) What would prove it?
   (b) Rom. 1:4 “4 And declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead:”
   (c) Thus it is always in the conditional.

b. “O my Father, if it be possible”; Mat. 26:39 “39 And he went a little further, and fell on his face, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt.”
   (1) If He had not been a righteous Son, if He had not done the Father’s will, He could not have been raised from the dead.
   (2) Christ wanted to be raised from the dead but it was dependent on the Father’s will. His Father’s will was to accept Him as a Son who needed no Savior.

4. So, when He was raised from the dead, “Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten Thee” (Acts 13:33-37 “33 God hath fulfilled the same unto us their children, in that he hath raised up Jesus again; as it is also written in the second psalm, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee. 34 And as concerning that he raised him up from the dead, now no more to return to corruption, he said on this wise, I will give you the sure mercies of David. 35 Wherefore he saith also in another psalm, Thou shalt not suffer thine Holy One to see corruption. 36 For David, after he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell on sleep, and was laid unto his fathers, and saw corruption: 37 But he, whom God raised again, saw no corruption.”).

Conclusion: While it is my studied view that Christ was praying to be raised out of death, neither view is a test of fellowship among brethren. I do believe that the position I have enumerated, however, helps us to understand many things better.