

Bite Size Bible Study

Praying like Jesus #160

By Pastor Lee

I was rereading some old weekly studies that Lois Tverberg had written some time ago and was intrigued with one she called "Praying as Jesus Did". {I'm not sure these are still on the internet}

Jesus quoted Deuteronomy a great deal. This book was very important to the Jewish culture in the first century. In this book we find the background of the Jewish practice of prayer. We hear this, if we listen closely, many times in the words of Jesus as well as Paul. Learning about how they prayed is more than just an interesting study; it is powerful experience in maturing our own prayer life. Incorporating their style of prayer can improve our prayer life and give us a new sense of God's presence.

This amazingly rich tradition is ultimately based on a few lines Deuteronomy 8:11-14a (CJB):

"Be careful not to forget Adonai your God by not obeying his mitzvot, rulings and regulations that I am giving you today. Otherwise, after you have eaten and are satisfied, built fine houses and lived in them, and increased your herds, flocks, silver, gold and everything else you own, you will become proud-hearted. Forgetting Adonai your God...."

These lines about blessing God for the things that he had given them, developed into a tradition of many short, one or two line prayers which are uttered immediately upon having any type of happy experience, and the sad occasions as well. This resulted in a person's day being filled with many short prayers that constantly give thanks and praise to God. Paul wrote: *Always be joyful. Pray regularly* (unceasingly, continually). *In everything give thanks, for this is what God wants from you who are united with the Messiah Yeshua.* 1Thes. 5:16-18 CJB

We might wonder how this could be done. But in fact, Paul was already a part of a culture that did exactly that; they gave thanks in all circumstances and prayed at every opportunity. The gospel accounts show that Jesus used many short prayers that were a part of His culture.

The Jews saw that God wanted them to bless Him whenever they received good things from Him so that they would not forget that He was the source. It is easy to cling to God when times are tough, but to forget God when times are good and our needs have been met. So they developed a number of short prayers to be said whenever the occasion arises. In Jesus' day the first line was probably just "*Blessed is He...*", This causes us to focus on God as the source of all blessing, and praise Him for His goodness. In these prayers they were

mentally kneeling before God, reminding themselves of His goodness in providing them everything. In the gospels it says that Jesus "*took the bread and blessed*". The words He most likely said would be, "*Blessed is He who brings forth bread from the earth.*"

We read that when Jesus did miracles, the people "glorified God" - probably saying "*Blessed is He who has performed a miracle in this place*". It was customary to pray the blessing before leaving the site where the miracle occurred, or to return to the place to say it. So when Jesus heals ten lepers and only one, a Samaritan, comes back and loudly blesses God, Jesus wonders why the other nine haven't returned to do the same.

We can get a glimpse of some of Jesus' prayer life by hearing some of these little prayers that are packed with wisdom, and even try them out ourselves:

When the first flowers were seen on the trees in the spring, it was traditional to say *Blessed are you, oh Lord our God, King of the Universe, who did not omit anything from the world, and created within it good creations and good trees for people to enjoy.*

When they heard thunder or felt an earthquake they blessed God by using the phrase "*Blessed are you, oh Lord ... whose strength and power fill the world.*"

When they went through a long, difficult time and finally had relief, or celebrated some happy event for which they waited, they said, "*Blessed are you, oh Lord ... who has allowed us to live, and sustained us and enabled us to reach this day.*"

When a son returned home from war, or when a baby was born, or some other wonderful thing, they stopped to praise God for bringing them to that point in their lives.

Even ordinary things that give pleasure were an occasion to bless God. When they put on a new piece of clothing they said, *Blessed are you, oh Lord ... who clothes the naked.*

Even in times of grief, when someone died or they heard tragic news, they blessed God. They said "*Blessed are you, oh Lord ..., you are the true judge.*" It was a reminder that God was still good, even when they heard about tragic events, and that He will ultimately bring justice where justice doesn't seem to be present.

Perhaps our attitude will become more like Jesus and Paul as we continue praying these things as well.

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