

Our daily Bible verses for the past week have a common theme of seeking Jesus through prayer. Today we will look at the concept of prayer, what it is, and how we are to pray and how prayer is integral to our lives as Christians.

Background: One of the ways prayer can be viewed is in the context of Temple/Tabernacle Sacrificial Worship.

Sacrificial System

- The sacrificial system has a very concrete and distinct function:
 - It's a means through which God can dwell among His people without destroying them, in order to purify, sanctify, and bless them.
- The sacrificial system is continuous.
 - It means that God's people were either always interceded for, always in God's grace.
 - **OR** they were cut off from His grace.
 - And because the sacrificial system includes forgiveness of sins, that means repentance is always possible.

Then Versus Now

- We serve in the temple of God and in the world at the same time
- God's presence on Mount Sinai was a one-time occurrence and fixed to the mountain.
- The Tabernacle was God's perpetual presence, but mobile.
- The Temple was God's presence fixed, as a permanent resting place.
- Now we have something better: The Temple we serve in is eternal and everywhere.
 - We can offer petitions for people.
 - We can do it directly, not indirectly through a sacrificial system.
 - We can do it anytime, not only in the morning and evening.
 - We can do it from any location; we don't have to travel to Jerusalem.
 - Best of all, our High Priest is sinless, immortal, and is always interceding for us.
- In the OT sacrificial system, in the daily service, God's people are first purified of their sins, then they are made to share in God's holiness, and then they receive God's blessings.
- It is the same now, in that Jesus has atoned for our sins, clothed us in His righteousness, and blesses us.

Royal Priesthood: 1Pe 2:9 But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

- We are royal, we belong to God.
- Jesus sits on the throne, the same throne as God, meaning that He and the Father are one.
- We, God's people, are a *priestly* people (The emphasis is on the priestly office)
- Consider the office of priest in the OT and how this corresponds to the present reality, how we serve the nations through our prayer, and especially the Church through the Lord's Prayer.

Imagery

- As we engage in prayer, we don't imagine things that don't exist, but things that do exist, though unseen and therefore must be received by faith. (As with the images in Revelation)
- When we pray, we pray to God who is seated in the true Tabernacle.
- We pray with Jesus who intercedes for us.
- The Holy Spirit makes our prayer acceptable to God.

Prayer

Luther advocated daily prayer, as he wrote in the Large Catechism (1529): "Therefore from youth on we should form the habit of praying daily for our needs, whenever we are aware of anything that affects us or other people around us, such as preachers, magistrates, neighbors, and servants; and, as I have said, we should always remind God of his commandment and promise....This I say because I would like to see people learn to pray properly and not act so crudely and coldly that they daily become more inept in praying. This is just what the devil wants."

- What is prayer?
- Who can pray?

What Prayer Is: Prayer is the God-given way through which we may call on Him. It does not require strength or work on our part, but simply to receive Jesus according to His promise. To pray is to mysteriously dwell with God. It's more than just asking for things!

Who can pray? All children of God can come to Him in prayer. Jesus taught us to pray in Matthew 6: 9-14.

- Why should we pray?
- Is prayer an act of worship?

Why should we pray? God has commanded it; it is just as important as the other commandments. We pray so that God is glorified by His helping us and our praise and thanksgiving. Prayer is a command AND a gift from God.

Exo 20:7 “You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain.

Joh 14:13 Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son.

Is prayer an act of worship? Absolutely! In the Bible Christians ONLY pray to God. We can make prayer out to be a conversation between us and God, but we ALWAYS place our trust and faith in that which we pray to, which is God the Father. Prayers to false Gods is idolatry.

- Why is prayer difficult?
- How are we to pray?

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18:

"Rejoice always, *pray without ceasing*, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you."

- How are we to pray without ceasing?

Why is prayer difficult? Several reasons, and some being that we make it more difficult than it needs to be. Some common reasons are:

- a) We think we don't have enough faith: If we come to Jesus we do have enough faith
- b) We worry about doing it "wrong:" We can all pray to God. We only do it wrong if we do it with wrong intentions.
- c) We doubt that God can help us: If we doubt we can pray for strength in our faith.
- d) We think we don't know the right words: Look at the Lord's Prayer for guidance
- e) We feel overwhelming guilt.
- f) Our expectations: God often works in ways we don't expect or understand.
 - a. Isaiah 55:9 For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.

How are we to pray? Keep it simple! Remember Mary at the wedding in Cana: "They have no wine." It's OK to begin with yourself, then expand to friends, family, church, etc. We can pray for thanksgiving, repentance, faith, wisdom, whatever is appropriate. Supplicatory prayer is the "asking for things" part which is appropriate. Conversational prayer is also appropriate. We can speak to God through his word as well.

Act 1:8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

How are we to pray without ceasing? Consider the pattern of the sacrificial system:

- a) Every morning and evening: Gen 1:5 God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.
- b) The daily service in the OT followed this pattern. Every morning and evening, God's people were purified, sanctified, and blessed.
- c) God's people would worship and pray at the same hours.
- d) By the time of Daniel, we see the prayer office amplified with a middle prayer. Daniel prayed three times a day, interceding for his people.
- e) The three hours of prayer is common in the NT and was observed by Jesus and the apostles.
- f) Prayer is more than mere conversation with God, it's an excellent and high honor, a great privilege and a good work.
- g) If we pray morning and evening prayers, we pray unceasingly, and function as a royal priest in God's Temple.

Rom 8:26 Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words.