

From Our Lips to God's Ears: The Privilege of Prayer

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[0 : 00] Welcome here for this Sunday, January 28th, 2024. My name is Kent Dixon. It is my joy to be the pastor here. So this morning, we're continuing in our sermon series From Our Lips to God's Ears, Living a Life of Prayer.

And over the coming weeks, we're gonna continue to explore many different aspects of prayer and be reminded about why it's so critical that we seek to be people of prayer, continue to be that and prioritize it for us.

Just a quick reminder, if you miss any sermons in this series, you wanna catch up or wanna revisit any part of it, especially this morning, as I was thinking about this morning, I'm covering a lot of scripture this morning.

So the verses will be listed on the screen, but they're also on the website. So that's the great part about the sermon tool that we have on our website is it allows me to list all the scripture references as well.

So if you ever wanna go back and say, what the heck was that again? It's all there. I always put it up all there. So you can always find it there. Another option is if you're a Google person, Google Bramarkast, all one word.

[1 : 12] That's our podcast. And so each week, I upload the sermon from that week. And so you can always find, you can go back to day one, very first sermon I preached, very first series I preached, and find it there.

So if a sermon speaks to you at any point, share it. And that's not for our glory or for my glory, that is for the glory of God.

So if something spoke to you, it will speak to someone else. So share that. So last week in our sermon titled, The Power of Prayer, lots of you are here for that.

We saw how prayer can provide forgiveness from God, peace from God, strength from God, wisdom from God, boldness from Him, opportunities from and through Him, healing from Him, and peace and tranquility from God.

But the Bible makes it clear that this power isn't available to everyone who prays. Are you going, wait a second? For some people, now the Bible itself is clear about this, for some people, their prayers will be an abomination to God.

[2 : 27] Their prayers will fall on deaf ears. Their prayers will be hindered. Their prayers will not be answered favorably.

So that's the kind of message that you're hearing that lots of churches will say, will discount that kind of thing. Oh, God always hears our prayers. God will always answer prayer.

Well, it's important to be realistic about some of this and some of the things that Scripture tells us. So this morning's sermon, I cheated already and gave you the accidental teaser.

This morning our sermon is titled, The Privilege of Prayer. And we're going to start by considering something that may give you a moment of pause. Have you ever considered this fact that prayer is actually not a right?

It's a privilege. Prayer is not something that we are owed. It's not something we should expect, that God will act on our prayers specifically and precisely in the way in which we bring them.

[3 : 31] That's not to say that God won't act in the way we specifically ask, but also that he might not. Prayer also isn't something that we can or should consider to be optional.

It's essential and it's a privilege as well. As I was thinking about it, do you have friendships in your life where you can pick up, you can let years, even years pass, and you can pick up that relationship?

That's amazing. But for most of us, I believe, if I did not talk to the person that I share my home with for days, weeks, or months on end, that relationship would begin to wane.

It would begin to suffer. It would begin to be less and less of a priority. It's the same with our relationship with God. We shouldn't come to God only when we need something, right?

And yet, I believe that's our default often. We're going to dig into this area a little bit more deeply this morning and we're going to start with some bad news first.

[4 : 37] So let's take the medicine first. Let's consider people for whom, and I touched on this a little bit, for whom prayer is not a privilege, not available to them necessarily.

So first, and I even put it in red so you get the bad news, prayer is not a privilege that's available to people who don't follow God's word.

And hopefully that's not a surprise. The Bible tells us that the prayers of people who turn their ears away from the law, away from God's will, are an abomination to him.

They are offensive to him. Proverbs 28, verse 9 says, if one turns away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer is an abomination.

Prayer is also, and this is still on the same slide, prayer is also not a privilege for people who don't follow sound teaching. Now, I don't know about you, but I'm paying more and more attention to the less sound teaching I'm hearing all the time in the world and in the church at large.

[5 : 48] 2 Timothy 4, verses 3 and 4 says, for the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching. Do you think that time is here now?

I think it might be. People will have itching ears, it says. They will accumulate for themselves teachers to, hear this, teachers to suit their own passions.

They will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths. Makes perfect sense, doesn't it? That if we aren't listening, or worse, won't listen to God stubbornly, why should we expect him to listen to us?

Why? Prayer also isn't a privilege for people whose sins separate them from God. And all of you may be thinking, well, my sins separate me from God.

However, you recognize that and you're engaging in the process of forgiveness. But sin can separate us from God in such a way that he will not hear us.

[6 : 53] Isaiah 59, verses 1 and 2 says, So we can read about the condition of those who will not seek God's forgiveness.

People who don't see a need to repent and seek forgiveness. Did you catch that? I said will not. Someone who stubbornly refuses to or foolishly neglects to seek God's forgiveness.

There's a pridefulness there. Romans 6, verse 23 makes it pretty clear as to the reward for that kind of heart when it says, you know it, for the wages of sin is death.

But the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus, our Lord. So if we reject God's forgiveness of sins, that free gift, if we reject it, how can we realistically expect him to listen to our prayers?

Is that fair? Prayer also is not a privilege available to people who refuse to treat others with justice. And now here's, again, lots of passages.

[8 : 24] So again, available here if you're writing like a fiend or flipping your pages like crazy in your Bible. I will read these passages, but they're also going to be on the website. So first of all, what does justice look like?

Well, first, people who fail to consider the poor. Psalm 41, verses 1 to 3 says, blessed is the one who considers the poor.

In the day of trouble, the Lord delivers him. The Lord protects him and keeps him alive. He is called blessed in the land. You do not give him up to the will of his enemies.

The Lord sustains him on his sickbed. In his illness, you restore him to full health. Now hear this one, gentlemen. People who fail to treat their wives as they should.

Now keep listening. This is not a one-sided directive, so there's more to come. Malachi 2, verses 13 and 14 says, And this second thing you do.

[9 : 30] You cover the Lord's altar with tears, with weeping and groaning, because he no longer regards the offering or accepts it with favor from your hand. But you say, why does he not?

Because the Lord was witness between you and the wife of your youth, to whom you have been faithless. Though she is your companion and your wife by covenant.

Now here's the other side of the coin. 1 Peter 3, verse 7 says, Likewise, husbands, love your wives in an understanding way, showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel.

Now don't panic about the weaker vessel language. It implies a codependence, healthy codependent relationship. It's not implying that women are weaker, lesser than, any of those things.

Since they are heirs with you, it continues. So you hear that? there's an equal level of responsibility in relationship. Since they are heirs with you of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered.

[10 : 47] Husbands, love your wives in an understanding way. People who fail to make things right with those they have offended. Matthew 5, verses 23 and 24 says, Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar, and there remember that your brother and sister has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar.

First, go and be reconciled to them, then come and offer your gift. There's a heart and a repentance and a reconciliation there that is a requirement.

People who don't forgive others who have sinned against them. And you've heard me talk about God's forgiveness is reliant upon us forgiving others. Matthew 18, verses 21 to 35.

Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times? Peter's so generous, right?

Jesus answered, I tell you, not seven times, but 77 times. And that's not an actual number. That's to imply forgive and forgive and forgive.

[12 : 06] Jesus says, I love this story. As he began the settlement, a man who owed him 10,000 bags of gold was brought to him.

Since he was not able to pay, the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt. At this, the servant fell on his knees before him.

Be patient with me, he begged, and I will pay back everything. The servant's master took pity on him, canceled the debt, and let him go.

But when the servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him 100 silver coins. He grabbed him and began to choke him. Pay back what you owe me, he demanded.

His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, be patient with me, and I will pay it back. But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt.

[13 : 13] When the other servants saw what had happened, they were outraged and went and told their master everything that had happened. Then the master called the servant in. You wicked servant, he said.

I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you? In anger, his master handed him over to the jailers to be tortured until he should pay back all he owed.

Jesus says, this is how my heavenly father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother or sister from your heart. There's so much clarity in the Bible about how we are to treat other people.

So if we don't treat others with justice and kindness and mercy, how can we ever even remotely expect to receive those things from God?

Friends, prayer also isn't a privilege that's available to people who pray without faith. It's impossible to please God if we do not have faith.

[14 : 26] Hebrews 11, verse 6 says, And without faith it is impossible to please God because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those earnestly who seek him.

So asking God with doubt in our hearts when we pray, Michelle and I had a real good conversation about this the other day. So when we pray, do we pray tentatively saying, Lord, I sure hope you heal this person but if you don't I get it because I probably don't understand what you're doing and it's hard, right?

But if you're seeking to pray according to God's will, in God's will, you're in a good place. Asking with doubt in our hearts when we pray though, especially when we aren't open and honest with God about those struggles, that doubt can effectively sabotage our prayers.

So God gets that faith is not always easy so be honest with them about it. James 1 verses 5 to 8 says, If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God who gives generously to all without finding fault and it will be given to you.

But when you ask you must believe and not doubt because the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea blown and tossed by the wind.

[15 : 53] that person should not expect to receive anything from the Lord. Such a person is double-minded and unstable in all they do.

So if we doubt God's existence, if we doubt his will, his ability to provide, his ability to answer prayer, why should he answer us?

So we need to recognize and we have this morning that this privilege of prayer is not extended to everyone. And maybe that's still a shock.

Maybe you're rattled by that. Because it's a blessing that is graciously bestowed on those whose hearts are in a proper condition, in a proper orientation.

So, here's the good news. Let's consider people for whom prayer is a privilege that is available to them. So prayer is a privilege available to someone who acknowledges themselves to be a sinner.

[16 : 56] Someone who is truly, sincerely seeking righteousness. So as we learn from the example of Cornelius in the book of Acts, he was a good man who still needed salvation.

You can be a good person and still need the gospel, still need Jesus Christ. Acts 10 verse 1 and 2 says, I have them listed in order of chapter 10 but I'm jumping around a little bit.

At Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion in what was known as the Italian regiment. He and all his family were devout and God-fearing.

He gave generously to those in need and prayed to God regularly. Hear that correct orientation that we've already talked about? Acts 11 verse 14 says, He will bring you a message through which you and all your household will be saved.

So Cornelius' prayers and his charitable spirit has been noticed by God. That's what we're hearing there. Then an angel appears to Cornelius in Acts 10 verse 4 and we read, Cornelius stared at him in fear.

[18 : 12] What is it, Lord? He asked. The angels answered, Your prayers and gifts to the poor have come up as a memorial offering before God.

Imagine that, right? The things that we do, have you ever thought of that? The things that we do hit God's radar. The things that we don't do hit God's radar.

Instantly. So we think, well, I'm just going to let this one go. He knows. I'm going to do this and I'm not going to tell anybody that I did it.

He knows. Continuing in Acts 10 verse 31, the angel says, Cornelius, God has heard your prayer and remembered your gifts to the poor.

Recognizing Cornelius' sincerity and his servant heart, God saw to it that he had the opportunity to hear the words by which he could be saved.

[19 : 11] God made a way for Cornelius to hear the gospel. In Acts 10 verse 14, the angel says, he will bring you a message through which you and all your household will be saved.

So it's important to note here that Cornelius' salvation didn't just come by prayer alone, right? God made a way for him to hear the gospel.

He still needed to hear words, hear a message by which he would be saved. He needed to hear the gospel of Christ, which is God's power for salvation.

God heard the prayer of a sinner like Cornelius, a man who was hungry and thirsty for righteousness. So what does Matthew 5 verse 6 say about this kind of approach?

church. It says, and you know this, blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

[20 : 15] Cornelius was asking, he was seeking, he was knocking. Matthew 7 verses 7 and 8 says, ask and it will be given to you.

Seek and you will find. Knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks the door will be opened.

God will always provide an opportunity for a sinner who is sincerely seeking truth and righteousness to have their prayers heard, to have their prayers answered through the good news of Jesus Christ.

prayer is a privilege available to sincere followers of Jesus Christ, people who seek him as their high priest.

As followers of Jesus Christ, we recognize that, right? Scripture tells us that, that Jesus is the way, Jesus is our high priest, the way through which we come to God.

[21 : 24] Hebrews 2 verses 17 and 18 reminds us of this key reason why Jesus came in the flesh. It says, for this reason he had to be made like them, fully human in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people, because he himself suffered when he was tempted.

tempted. He is able to help those who are being tempted. Friends, with Jesus as our high priest, it's possible for us to approach God's throne boldly with confidence in prayer.

Hebrews 4 verses 14 to 16 says, therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess.

For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses. We have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are, yet he did not sin.

Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

[22 : 52] It's only through Jesus that we can have access to God as he is always and eternally standing to bridge that gap, standing in the space between us and God that our sin would otherwise make it impossible to come before the Father.

Hebrews 7 verse 25 says of Jesus, therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him because he always lives to intercede for them.

Jesus stands with and for us both as our advocate with the Father on our behalf and the mediator between God and humanity.

Do you think we need a mediator? 1 John 2, 1 John chapter 2 verse 1 says, My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin.

But if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ, the righteous one. 1 Timothy 2 verses 5 and 6 reminds us, For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all people.

[24 : 22] This has now been witnessed to at the proper time. Romans 8 34 encourages us, who then is the one who condemns?

No one. Christ Jesus who died, more than that, who was raised to life, is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.

This is the blessing of prayer that is available to everyone who has put their faith in Christ and become a child of God through faith. My friends, take courage in knowing that the ears of the Lord are open to the prayers of the righteous.

As 1 Peter 3 verse 12 reminds us, for the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their prayer. But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.

So we must submit to the righteousness of God that is offered to us in and through Christ because as Romans 10 verses 1 to 4 says, Christ is the culmination of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.

[25 : 43] So this is not, and you've heard me say this many times over the years, this is not a passive transaction. We must respond to the gospel of Christ.

Romans 1 verse 16 17 says, For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes, first to the Jew, then to the Gentile.

For in the gospel, the righteousness of God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last. Just as it is written, the righteous will live by faith.

So my friends, if we want to have the privilege of prayer, there's two options for us. We must either be a faithful child of God through obedience to Jesus Christ, or a sinner with a good and noble heart who is seeking after truth and righteousness, like Cornelius was, because God will make a way.

If a sinner who is hungering and thirsting for righteousness will be filled, how much more will a child of God, when he or she, experiences the privilege of prayer in all its fullness.

[27 : 13] So, let's pray without ceasing. Amen? Amen.