

Observation on True Prayer

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Date: 11 July 2010

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[0 : 00] Well now, before we turn to Scripture, let's just bow our heads in prayer. O Lord our God, we give you thanks for the reminder to us in the reading of Holy Scripture that this is a wonderful privilege of your people, that they have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God.

And we bless you for him. We bless you that he ascended up on high and that he has taken his place, place given to him by you the Father.

Place of which he could say, here in this world all authority is given to me, in heaven and on earth. And we bless you that he is there ruling over all.

And although here in this world there is much to perplex us and discourage us and make us afraid, nevertheless, it's good to remind ourselves here that he rules over all.

We pray, O Lord, today that you will remember your cause in this world, in the situations where your people struggle because of the persecution of those who are enemies of your cause.

[1 : 26] O Lord, we know that this has been happening down through the ages. Indeed, it happened at the very beginning of human history when Cain rose up against his brother and slew him.

And we know that there is that in the natural man. That capacity is there. We hear about it and see it. We read of it every week of the year.

And we pray, O Lord, that you will remember your people, that you will send them deliverance, and that even those who oppose them might under your gracious hand be persuaded to follow Jesus.

We come to you, O Lord, with our many cares. We care for the land that you have placed us in, and we pray that it may again know days of your power and grace.

For many of us, we just read about these things in history. But we pray that it may please you to come down as you have in the past, and work mightily by your own spirit, enlightening people in your knowledge and fear, and showing them your ways, bringing them to not only consider Jesus, but to find in their hearts belief in him.

[2 : 57] We remember, O Lord, those who are in authority over us. We remember the Queen and her royal household, and we commend her and her family to you.

We pray that they may know the reality of the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ, that they may say, as a queen of old said, that though she was a queen of a great empire, yet she was a humble servant of the King of the universe, the Lord Jesus Christ.

And we pray this for her and her family. We remember those in government, in cabinet, and in opposition too. And we pray, O Lord, that there may be signs in these days of a humbling of those who lead us in these matters of state, and a finding in their hearts that it's time to seek wisdom from God.

We thank you that in the Lord Jesus Christ we have one in whom wisdom dwells in all its fullness. May they find it, therefore, decidable to seek him.

We pray for those known to us who are struggling with illness, whether it is illnesses of the mind or of the body, or both for that matter.

[4 : 27] We pray that you will give them what they need to go on in the way, and to wait patiently for the Lord their God, knowing that at length you will bring them the kind of strengthening they need.

Whatever the season that they're passing through, you will give them strength equal to their days. O Lord, we know that we never get strength for a trial till we're in that trial.

Often we worry about how we'll fare in this illness or that, but we never know it until we're in it. And reassure them, therefore, that you will give them the strength they need for what you've laid upon them.

We pray too, O Lord, that you would remember us in our spiritual needs, that you will meet with us. We have a great foe in that old serpent, the devil.

He is no figment of the imagination, but a real sinister spirit, working with his minions to ruin people's lives.

[5 : 45] enable us, O Lord, in all the sophistication of modern life to recognize the spiritual realm as real and having in it these malevolent beings that bear upon our lives in ways that we know little enough about.

Make us strong in the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, that we may be in him by faith more than conquerors. Turn to us now, O Lord, and bless us under the word.

Open it to us and graciously give us something for our needy souls. Lord, we pray that you will blot out all our transgressions.

You know our hearts through and through. You know what lurks within. You know, as we were thinking recently, that there are, as it were, rooms, so to speak, within our hearts that we keep as closed as we can.

There are things we refuse to give up. Deliver us, O God, and pardon us for such folly and sin. And grant that we may be received and loved and forgiven for the sake of the Lord Jesus Christ.

[7 : 09] Amen. Well, now we're going to turn to Psalm 84 and you'll find that on page 526.

We'll just read from the beginning and we'll not remark on what we've covered because we'll just do recap then in the introduction.

How lovely is your tabernacle, O Lord of hosts! My soul longs, yes, even faints for the courts of the Lord. My heart and my flesh cry out for the living God.

Even the sparrow has found a home and the swallow a nest for herself where she may lay her yin. Even your altars, O Lord of hosts, O Lord Almighty, my King and my God.

Blessed are those or happy are those who dwell in your house. They will still be praising you, Selah, that is considered.

[8 : 15] Blessed is the man whose strength is in you, whose heart is set on pilgrimage. As they pass through the valley of Beka, the vale of tears, they make it a spring.

The rain also covers it with pools. They go from strength to strength. Each one appears before God in Zion. O Lord, God of hosts, hear my prayer.

Give ear, O God of Jacob. O God, behold our shield and look upon the face of your Anointed. Our text today is in the verses 8 and 9 which we have just read and I want to think about these verses, Psalm 84, verses 8 and 9 in terms of observations on true prayer.

Now, people of course from different religious backgrounds or even strangely no religious background at all may indeed pray.

And such people tend to become very touchy if you begin to talk to them about true prayer. In fact, they can become quite annoyed if they get the message that you're saying that true prayer is only accepted in the court of heaven through the Lord Jesus Christ.

[9 : 40] But the Bible makes it clear that that's the way it is. We read in John 14 the well-known words verse 6 Jesus said to Philip no one comes to the Father except through me.

And that is it in some substance there is simply no way of acceptance except through him. And here in these verses we have some useful insights into this matter of true prayer.

and we'll look at how the Messiah himself is there in the passage verse 9 Behold O God our shield and look upon the face of your Messiah.

The anointed means the Messiah. And Jesus is uniquely the anointed one of God. But before we get into that I just want to recap and perhaps for the sake of our visitors that would be helpful.

I want to remind you that we've been looking at how this opening part how lovely is your dwelling place is not just about a church or a temple as it was then in Jerusalem or something like that.

[10 : 59] It's about being living stones in the living temple that's built or is being built by God through his spirit.

And you remember how Peter and Paul too for that matter in Ephesians 2 they both take up the subject that we are being built a spiritual dwelling place for God through the spirit.

And this of course in the psalm the psalm has clothed his meaning in the familiar things of the Old Testament period when the temple was operating.

That is a rule of course in all the Old Testament insights into the spiritual house of God. That's why you get the apostles referring back to these things with ease.

You are a special people a holy priesthood and so on to offer up spiritual offerings to God through Jesus Christ. They are comfortable with drawing on the Old Testament because they knew that the real heart of the meaning wasn't the outward building but the living by faith stones that were being built up as God's temple and so on.

[12 : 22] As I say he uses things familiar to make that point. But we saw too that these folks are likened to God's pilgrims.

They are journeying through this world to their eternal home, to their eternal inheritance. We read there in John 14 I go to prepare a place for you.

In my father's house there are many dwelling places. Things familiar in the Old Testament. Mansions is really still used in the translations but a mansion conjures up for us somewhere that's an awesome sized house.

But it's simply dwelling places. what we need he will provide. That's the point. And the Lord's people as we're reading they're journeying on their way through this world to that inheritance.

You see verse 5 their heart is set on pilgrimage. As they pass through the valley of tears they're allowed to turn it into a place of blessing.

[13 : 32] We looked at that last time. They're journeying on towards their heavenly home. And we notice in this particular passage that Christian believers must often seek the Lord earnestly for his help and blessing.

Because here in this world we are beset on all sides as we were saying by spiritual forces that are working against us. And we are wise when we recognize that.

Paul said very emphatically to the Ephesians we wrestle not against flesh and blood. We may not make much of a boxing match with somebody we can see but it's a sight easier to have a go that way than to wrestle with the forces we can't see that manipulate our situation that inject Paul talks about the burning arrows that Satan injects burning arrows horrid thoughts perplexing thoughts sin engendering thoughts and so on and it's a difficult road to travel there are many enemies that is much opposition to us and we are therefore to make it our daily aim to call upon the Lord in the day of trouble in our time of need and know that he has his way of answering us.

There are three things I just want to highlight briefly that the psalmist observes here on true prayer. First of all he has a sense of the majesty of God and we need that we need it.

I don't know if you've ever tried to tell other people about the Lord Jesus Christ and indeed to talk about God Father Son and Holy Spirit but if you do if you've done it you'll know that most folk if they allow God to exist then their idea of God is that he's just a wee bit bigger than themselves that's about it.

[15 : 56] Not that he is awesome that he is beyond our comprehension of course the problem here is you can talk nowadays about sports people and people use words that really belong to God and not men so and so is awesome so and so is glorious and so and so it goes on and on like that.

So the words that used to be used particularly of God are now almost common place in the world of achievers mostly sports people and in a sense we need to recognize the importance of distinguishing when we use these words that when we use them of God we are talking in terms in absolute terms that God is awesome in that sense he is majestic that were we to see him we would be no different than Isaiah was when he saw him or Daniel when he saw him woe is me I am in den I am a man of unclean lips and I dwell among a people of unclean lips for my eyes have seen the king and so we need that sense of the majesty of God of the one with whom we have to do the old divines used to talk about him being infinitely exalted above us and that wasn't intended to put him away out there beyond us it was simply used to remind us of his awesome majesty the wonderful thing is that he condescends to come near to us and the psalm writer you see aware of him speaks to him like this verse 8

O Lord God of hosts hear my prayer I use the word almighty O Lord God almighty because modern translations tend to opt for that the word hosts is an interesting word and there's much ink being spilt on the meaning of the word is Sabaoth O Lord God of Sabaoth of the armies of the heavens of the spiritual dimension that we know very little about and the idea there is to generate in us to think about him as awesome as almighty not only is he the whole world in his hands little planet earth with its population but the universe with all the rational forces that are out there and he says to him he addresses him like this with a real sense of his majesty

O Lord God of hosts O Lord God almighty hear my prayer we need that deep sense of the awesome majesty of God when we draw near to him not to be unkind but this approach is not the in thing nowadays in the church and often you hear people perhaps using the words heavenly father almost as punctuation in public prayer instead of remembering that when we dare to call him father we are daring to call him father on the basis of what he is and has done and is doing in Christ for us and so we are to consider his majesty even when we dare to call him our father in heaven we are reminding ourselves about him as the eternal God who is over all

I mentioned earlier on Daniel when Daniel began to speak to the Lord when he realised that the 70 years of captivity in Babylon that period was drawing to an end you'll find it in Daniel chapter 9 verses 1 to 19 it's a wonderful prayer a study on how this great man of God approaches the Lord and he speaks to the Lord about the Lord in the most exalted language he reverently approaches he recognises that he himself like all the people have sinned and come short that they're full of unrighteousness but to God alone belongs moral righteousness and it is on the basis of what God is in his glorious majesty and his righteousness that we approach him and appeal to him for his help he is the one who the psalmist draws near to and it's important for us to draw near with this attitude reminding ourselves you don't need to remind him of what he's like we remind ourselves of who it is we are approaching and what we think about him that matters he rules over all one of the best most majestic chapters in the whole of the

[21 : 39] Bible by those who study literature I don't just mean Christians I mean scholars one of the most majestic passages in the whole of the Bible is Isaiah chapter 40 and it's a chapter that that speaks so wonderfully of God and who he is he is the one of whom it is said he not only rules over all but he calls out the stars by name not one of them fails because of him even when they change their shape so to speak even when they cease at one level to be what they were nothing is happening that he hasn't ordered he rules over all the spirits and human beings all things the nations said Isaiah are like a drop of water in the bottom of a bucket to him to whom will you liken me says the

Lord and it's important therefore to remind ourselves of who we're dealing with when we come to the Lord look at the apostles how they thought about him and spoke about him they revered him and we need to do the same Paul in Romans 9 looking at the whole question of the Jewish people of Israel and what's going to happen to them he talks about how God took them out more or less all in order that the gentile nations which we belong to would benefit and his purpose is to bring the Israelites back to the faith of Abraham Isaac and Jacob and so on and he says oh the depth of the wisdom and the knowledge of God how unsearchable are his judgments and his ways past finding out oh

Lord God Almighty hear my prayer let's meditate on what he is like as we approach him the second thing we want to look at is the psalmist sense of covenant relationship to God and that's important too and it's brought out here it may not be apparent but it's here in verse 8 give ear oh God of Jacob why not God of somebody else in the Bible come on now think about it think about your own knowledge of the life of Jacob think about how it was that that Jacob was taught as much about prayer as anyone and there is this sense of covenant relationship brought to the fore in the words give ear oh

God of Jacob but before we pursue that a little further let me remind you of the importance of thinking about covenant if there's one thing the church is lacking today it is thinking about God as a covenant keeping God we talk about the Old Testament and the New Testament and we really talk about the old covenant age and the new covenant age it's all about covenant God himself coming to people God coming to them and taking them into a relationship with himself his way by his power and by his grace and he is the God who keeps covenant and mercy and in a sense the difference between the old covenant found in the up to the coming of

Jesus and the new covenant is simply that what is developing as a plant would develop before it flowers that's the difference the same covenant is one in the same covenant the promised seed the promised messiah would come and when he came he could say himself at that Passover table before he died when he took the cup this is a new covenant in my blood not something totally different that never happened before a new thing no no new in the sense that it's the fullness of what was promised it's the flower at last those of you are gardeners and you've got expensive flowers you know how you watch over them you're long and you're protecting them because you don't want the wind to batter them the rain to batter them as well in a sense no no you want the flower but the flower has come from the bulb from the plant and the whole of the new old testament period is about the plant growing towards the flower and all the way along that plant has got things in it that tell you about the flower or if you like

[27 : 33] Augustine's view of it it's the room that's dark and everything is there in the room you just need the light to switch on and you'll see you can take it that way if you like the bottom line is the coming of Jesus is about the fulfillment in this world anyway of God's covenant love and grace to sinners it has its full realization in his coming and when we go back therefore to the psalm writer's words he's thinking in terms of covenant relationship oh God of Jacob Jacob you remember had the covenant promises of Messiah reaffirmed to him they were given to Abraham to Isaac renewed and to Jacob renewed but Jacob was the one who had most lessons in prayer or a key lesson in prayer you find it in

Genesis 32 verses 22 you remember when he was going back to his own land and he was afraid that Esau would kill him that Esau had nursed his grudge because Jacob had outsmarted him you remember and got the inheritance from his father and he was afraid and he stopped and he spent the night and we're told he wrestled to the breaking of day with a man and it became wonderfully apparent that that man was no mere mortal but the son of God had taken this temporary form and he wrestled with Jacob at the place called Peniel and Jacob named it that why did he name it Peniel or Peniel because Peniel means face or presence and El means God

I have seen the face or the presence of God and my life is still in me and Jacob pops up here in this passage as an observation on true prayer because he learned some wonderful things about true prayer that his answers to prayer came through the one whom he met and clung to and had an answer from at that place he called Peniel the face of God and the psalm writer speaking by the Holy Spirit therefore is telling you and me we must remember that and use that time's moving on rather swiftly but there's an interesting passage I'll give you the chapter and you can look for the verse later on in

Malachi chapter 3 the prophet says this I did not say at any time to the seed of Jacob that is the spiritual seed I did not say at any time to the seed of Jacob seek me in vain now that's an interesting verse in this connection we'll not seek him in vain if we seek him by faith the faith of Abraham Isaac and Jacob the faith in the one who to whom Jacob clung in his weakness and had an answer from at the place he named Peniel the face of God and you see we need that angle on true prayer Jacob held on in weakness he clung he wouldn't let go and in his abject weakness the Lord gave him an answer and he was able to go back home and meet

Esau and be safe and so on and there's something about this that we mustn't leave you see we take the biblical examples and we go to the Lord with them by faith we fill our mouths with the very arguments that the Lord's people used they're there in the Bible for us you'll not know this well you may know it my wife tells me don't say you'll not know this and I'm reminded of that you may not know this but John Calvin's refrain in prayer was how long oh Lord now he was a reformer and from our point of view look what was happening in his day the cause of Christ was advancing on every hand but John Calvin as a person as a man of God as a sincere follower of

[32 : 42] Jesus his refrain in prayer was how long oh Lord and we were singing in the psalm psalm 13 how long will you forget me Lord will you forget always we take what I'm saying is we take these prayers of these people of God and we use them wherever they're appropriate in our experience we take them to the Lord we're not just quoting scripture for quoting scripture sake if we are we're wrong no no we're taking the arguments that God put in the hearts of his people by his spirit long ago and we can use them today give ear oh God of Jacob and you see in that he will he will he will remember us he's not unaffected when we plead for the conversion of family members or friends or distant relatives or some other or colleagues or whatever no no we have to take these words of prayer and use them and plead them to the

Lord we lack assurance of faith we're to take the arguments of the Bible and use them give ear oh God of Jacob weak we may feel but we'll cling to him and we'll use his words and even if we finish up saying oh Lord how long we're to finish where that psalm finished but still when all is said and then Lord I trust your steadfast covenant love for that's the word I'll not go back you are the answerer of prayer send us an answer in peace last thing his sense of the need of Messiah now we've touched on this already so I'm just going to round it off by focusing in that Messiah is here he's here in verse 9 behold

O God our shield and look upon the face of your anointed your Messiah that's Jesus and he could speak about him as Messiah because he was Messiah before he came into this world he was ordained to that end we talk about him as the pre incarnate Christ you've heard me say that before he became man before the eternal son of God took our true manhood without sin of course and the theologians of the church from the earliest days talked freely about the pre incarnate Christ it was the pre incarnate before he became man Christ that fought and wrestled with Jacob that met the people of God along the way it was part of him revealing his purpose but first he is his shield he revealed himself to

Abraham long ago Genesis 15 fear not Abraham I am your shield and your exceeding great reward and he is the shield of his people still we were thinking about him as our shield and our strength recently it's so often found in the Old Testament scriptures he is the shield of his people he is the defender of his people and you see he is also God's anointed he is God's Messiah we miss the whole point of this if we just say oh well this is talking about a king in Israel not at all it's talking about the special one the Messiah of

God the Lord Jesus Christ talking about him anticipating his coming as one who appeared in different forms along the way to his people and we read in John 14 that in the fullness of time when Jesus not only came but went on in his public ministry he declared himself I am the way the truth and the life no one comes to the father except through me you may ask the father for something in my name we read that too it is in my name you ask says the Messiah says Jesus and he'll do it and we are to remind ourselves of how the psalmist spoke about him but we're also to use the light we have now on the

[38 : 13] Messiah Jesus we're to think about how he has become our shield in the fullest sense he has he has borne the wrath of God on the cross that's what his death was about he shields us from the wrath of God there is no condemnation there is no wrath upon those who are in Christ Jesus by faith he's dealt with that we thought a moment ago about him being our shield from the burning arrows of the wicked one and he's that too and he shields us when we are overwhelmed with our gloomy thoughts and our troubles in life we may call upon him to be our shield and our defender Paul finishes that wonderful passage in

Romans 8 saying we are more than conquerors through him who loved us and therefore we are to do what we read in the letter to the Hebrews we are to come boldly to the throne of grace seeing we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens Messiah Jesus the Son of God these are three angles three insights observations on true prayer let's take them away and meditate on them and use them and be blessed in so doing Amen