

# Prayer

A Look At Psalm 24

November 21, 2010

- I. Review of Previous Teaching on Prayer
  - A. Last Sunday, we looked at: (1) praying often – especially when faced with trials and tribulation, (2) praying persistently – in order to convey the message that what you are praying for is truly important to you, and (3) praying unceasingly.
    - 1. I also added two more truths to the first of the three important characteristics of prayer: humility, honesty, and fervency.
    - 2. And I want to continue reminding us throughout this series that all prayer is a form of fellowship and communion with God. Therefore, I am encouraging all of us to treat prayer as something that can grow from being primarily need based to being both need based and companionship or fellowship based.
  - B. Today, we will look at Psalm 24 to see how it can help us in our prayer life.
  - C. Prayer
- II. One More Thought Concerning Humility In Prayer.
  - A. Our view of God has a profound affect on our prayers. Pride sees self as knowing as much as God, if not a bit more. It is for this reason that pride is often caught up in deciding if God has acted acceptably, or if what He says about Himself is really true, or if He can be trusted to do what is genuinely best for us, or if His will is perfectly good in all situations. Therefore, pride is the enemy of a right view of God, and because of this, pride is the enemy of prayer.
  - B. On the other hand, humility sees self as far less than God in all things and in all ways. Where God is wise, humility recognizes self lacks wisdom. Where God is good and doing what is genuinely best for us, humility understands self hardly knows what is truly best, so it is not in a position to judge God's motives or choices or actions. Where God reveals parts of His being, character, and thinking to us, humility knows self – at best – sees and understands God as if looking through a foggy window. You see, it is humility that builds and supports faith in God – which means humility is the friend of prayer. Therefore, to pray confidently, to pray in faith to God as He really is, requires humility.
  - C. And so I urge you, keep humility and prayer together.

### III. Using **Psalm 24** to Guide and Direct Our Praying

A. [1] The earth is the LORD'S, and all it contains, the world, and those who dwell in it.

1. Every created thing belongs to God – which means there is nothing in our universe that does not belong to God or come under His rule.
2. As the owner and ruler of all things, God is therefore sovereign or all-powerful over all things.
  - a. He rules over your good times and hard times.
  - b. He rules over your gains and your losses.
  - c. He rules over your health and your diseases.
  - d. He rules over those who want to bless you and those who seem intent on harming you.
  - e. He rules over life and over death.
3. This truth should give us great fear and great courage in our prayers.
  - a. We ought to have great fear because we are not our own boss, we belong to God. Even though we have the ability to choose, we are not in a position whereby we have the right to choose. He is God. We are His created beings. He is Lord, we are His servants. The point here is that our prayers ought to reflect this aspect of His ownership and rule over us.
  - b. Yet we should also have great courage in prayer, because the same God who owns and rules over us owns and rules over everyone and everything else. Nothing approaches us or touches us or inflicts us or tempts us or harms us without His approval, His sustaining grace, and His empowerment to endure to the end.
  - c. For example:
    - (1) It is God who said: “Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, ‘Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,’ says the Lord” (**Romans 12:19**).
    - (2) And God also says that He will work all things together for good to those who love Him, to those who are called according to His purpose (**Romans 8:28**).
4. To summarize: Submission to His rule and ownership is our security, our gain, and our happiness. May this great truth be reflected in our prayers.

B. [2] For He has founded it upon the seas and established it upon the rivers.

1. At first glance, this statement tells us that everything belongs to God because He created it – as if to reinforce the reasons for submitting to God's rule and ownership.

2. But after meditating on this verse a bit I suspect most of us would realize that David is using this statement to remind us of the enormous place faith plays in our lives – and especially our prayer life when we cannot see or independently verify or scientifically prove what it is we are trusting God for.
  - a. The reality is, no one saw God create the heavens and the earth, and no one can independently or scientifically prove He created it from nothing to what it is today. And in our day, the current wisdom of science loudly makes claims that contradict, and even aim to disprove what God tells us about Himself and creation.
  - b. Yet in this statement, David is calling us to accept, by faith, God's word concerning creation, as given to us in **Genesis 1:1-10** . . . In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. [2] The earth was formless and void, and **darkness was over the surface of the deep**, and the Spirit of God was moving over the **surface of the waters**. [3] Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light. [4] God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. [5] God called the light day, and the darkness He called night. And there was evening and there was morning, one day. [6] Then God said, "Let there be an expanse in the **midst of the waters**, and **let it separate the waters from the waters**." [7] God made the expanse, and separated the waters which were below the expanse from the waters which were above the expanse; and it was so. [8] God called the expanse heaven. And there was evening and there was morning, a second day. [9] Then God said, "**Let the waters below the heavens be gathered into one place, and let the dry land appear**"; and it was so. [10] God called the dry land earth, and the gathering of the waters He called seas; and God saw that it was good.
  - c. The writer of Hebrews in speaking about the important place faith plays in the Christian life, gives an example of faith in the unseen when he says: "By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things which are visible" (**Hebrews 11:3**).
3. So what is the point here? Faith in God in relation to the unseen things of God, is vital – not only to the Christian life in general, but also to our prayer life.
  - a. Prayer requires some serious faith, because we are asking God to do what as yet has not been done for us, and we are asking for things we as yet do not possess.

b. Trusting God for what is yet unseen requires faith – faith in God, faith in His character, and faith in His promises. And the important point here is simply this:

- (1) If we will not believe God's revealed truths in unseen things of the past – like creation, we will not believe in God for the yet unseen things in the future.
- (2) And without faith, our prayers are little more than wishes spoken to a god we hope will grant us our wishes.

C. [3] Who may ascend into the hill of the LORD? And who may stand in His holy place? [4] He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who has not lifted up his soul to falsehood and has not sworn deceitfully.

1. Without question, purity of heart, mind, tongue, and behavior are requirements for coming into the presence of the Lord. Why? Because He is holy!

a. The scriptures teach that we are to be holy as He is holy (**Leviticus 11:44-45; 19:2; 20:7,26; 21:8; I Peter 1:16**), and we are to be perfect as our Heavenly Father is perfect (**Deuteronomy 18:13; I Kings 8:61; Matthew 5:48; James 1:4**).

b. And consider this example of the High Priest, who once a year entered into the Holy of Holies – that is, into the very presence of God – once a year to make atonement for the people.

(1) Obviously, the High Priest was not perfect in every way – as Jesus was perfect. Only Jesus has lived a perfect, sinless life. Only Jesus has been totally submissive to the will of God.

(2) Yet the High Priest, in spite of his imperfections, was able to come into the presence of God – and not only live, but interact with God in that room – if he obeyed the requirements given to him by God for coming into the Holy of Holies.

c. And so the Psalmist is making it clear, here in verses 3 and 4, that we have requirements from God for entering His presence in prayer. Therefore, in spite of our weakness and imperfections, spiritual perfection and holiness – or Christ-likeness – is to be our goal.

2. The apostle Paul spoke of this goal when he said: “Not that I have already obtained it or have already become perfect, but I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus. Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus” (**Philippians 3:12-14**).

3. And Peter shows us what happens to our prayers when we stray from a serious pursuit of godly living. In **I Peter 3:7** we read: “You husbands in the same way, live with your wives in an understanding way, as with someone weaker, since she is a woman; and show her honor as a fellow heir of the grace of life, **so that your prayers will not be hindered.**”
  4. Now you may be thinking that we stand before God as perfect already because of what Christ has done in paying for our sin and in being our mediator before God when we sin. Well, if you are thinking this, you are thinking correctly.
    - a. Christ’s death and resurrection on our behalf does give us positional righteousness or holiness in the presence of God. Yet there is a difference between positional righteousness and practical holiness.
      - (1) And the difference is this: Just as practical righteousness cannot purchase our salvation or pay the penalty for our sin, so neither does positional holiness make us holy in all our behavior.
      - (2) For example, the husband addressed by Peter concerning his treatment of his wife and his prayer life definitely had positional holiness, but that was not enough to get his prayers answered. Peter makes it clear that we need practical holiness as well, because the lack of practical holiness becomes a hindrance to getting our prayers answered.
    - b. Two more scriptures that tie this need for practical holiness to prayer:
      - (1) **Psalms 34:17** . . . The righteous cry, and the LORD hears and delivers them out of all their troubles.
      - (2) **Isaiah 57:15** . . . For thus says the high and exalted One who lives forever, whose name is Holy, "I dwell on a high and holy place, and also with the contrite and lowly of spirit in order to revive the spirit of the lowly (humble – which is a significant part of holiness) and to revive the heart of the contrite (repentant remorse over sin).
  5. So yes, we have positional righteousness in the sight of God, but positional righteousness coupled with practical holiness in thought, word, and deed opens the door to God’s presence **and His ears** far more than positional righteousness coupled with a careless, sinful life.
- D. [5] He shall receive a blessing from the LORD and righteousness from the God of his salvation.

1. Blessing and righteousness from God is bestowed on those who make it their goal to fulfill God's requirements for coming into His presence and asking for His help.
2. To receive a blessing from God is to be granted God's favor and be given good things from God.
3. To receive righteousness from God, as it is used here, could refer to positional righteousness because it comes from God, our savior. Or it could refer to further growth in practical righteousness – which is the natural result of putting off the old nature and putting on Christ. I choose to see it as referring to both positional righteousness and practical holiness since we need both for entering God's presence in prayer.

E. [6] This is the generation of those who seek Him, who seek Your face—even Jacob. Selah.

1. Those who seek the face of God, who have a serious longing to come into the presence of God, are those who are seriously pursuing practical holiness. Now you may wonder why God says this?
  - a. First, those who are not seriously seeking practical holiness show by their choices and behavior that they do not want to be with God. They have little or no desire to live in the presence of God. They may want to pray – and desperately so at certain times. But they don't long for fellowship and companionship with God. What they long for is their own happiness and well-being, and so prayer for them is a means of getting whatever help they can get from God to gain what they want.
  - b. Second, the natural effect of sin is to turn us away from God, not nurture the longing to draw near to God. Therefore, we will not be among those who seek God's presence if we have unconfessed, unrepented sin in our lives.
2. Interestingly, a serious pursuit of righteousness requires coming into God's presence in prayer and seeking His gracious strength and assistance to live righteously – which in turn promotes more coming to Him in prayer, which leads to enjoying Him more and more until one day you realize you want to return to His presence for the pure enjoyment of fellowship with Him.

F. [7] Lift up your heads, O gates, and be lifted up, O ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in! [8] Who is the King of glory? The LORD strong and mighty, the LORD mighty in battle. [9] Lift up your heads,

O gates, and lift them up, O ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in! [10] Who is this King of glory? The LORD of hosts, He is the King of glory. Selah.

1. These two stanzas are related to the Ark of the Covenant being returned to Jerusalem and placed in the Temple. The gates referred to are the gates of Jerusalem – the city of the King. The theme of these verses is spoken recognition and praise for God’s greatness.
2. The words: “The Lord, strong and mighty” are given practical meaning in the song Moses and the sons of Israel sang to the LORD: “I will sing to the LORD, for He is highly exalted; The horse and its rider He has hurled into the sea. [2] The LORD is my strength and song, And He has become my salvation; This is my God, and I will praise Him; My father's God, and I will extol Him. [3] The LORD is a warrior; The LORD is His name. [4] Pharaoh's chariots and his army He has cast into the sea; And the choicest of his officers are drowned in the Red Sea” (**Exodus 15:1-4**).
3. In meaning of the words “Lord of hosts” is that God is the God of many living beings. He is not the God of just the few that are in this room, or the larger few that are alive in the world today, or just the angels. He is the God of all who are His from eternity past to eternity future, and that most probably includes billions. He’s the Lord of hosts!

G. **Psalm 24** provides us with a view of God that nurtures respect toward God, confidence and faith in God, humility and holiness in us, and the boldness to ask for great and mighty and yet unseen things.

#### IV. Conclusion

- A. I want to remind us that there is great diversity in prayer. This is all well and good – for just as children communicate with their parents in a variety of ways during their growing up years, so Christians will communicate with God in a variety of ways.
- B. It is also true that much of our praying is need based. This too is acceptable to God for He is the One who tells us to pray in this way. Yet I urge you to keep before the fellowship side of prayer.
- C. And finally, beware of neglecting the exhortation from God to pray without ceasing. Look to God to show you how to make prayer more and more a part of your life, and nurture times of prayer and focused prayer to help make prayer more a part of your life than it is now. This is the path to unceasing prayer.