

## Praying God's Word

Introduction: There's more to prayer than just praying it. Sometimes we're intimidated by prayer for lack of personal creativity in finding right words to say. It's an amazing blessing to know we can approach the throne of God, the Creator and Sustainer of this universe, and know He listens to and answers our prayers, clumsy though they may be sometimes.

Prayer isn't just a blessing we enjoy, it's also a matter of faith. After concluding His teaching on being persistent in prayer, Jesus says, "Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?" (Luke 18:8) People of faith are people of prayer! One aspect of faith where prayer is concerned in the Bible is *praying God's word*.

### I. Nehemiah prayed God's word

- A. When Nehemiah went to God in prayer concerning Jerusalem, he incorporated God's words in his prayer.
- B. The circumstances:
  - 1. The Jews had been carried into Babylonian captivity because of their rebellion against God.
  - 2. Some were allowed to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the city and start life anew.
  - 3. One day, Nehemiah's brother returned from visiting Jerusalem and Nehemiah quickly sought news of its condition.
  - 4. When he learned the city was still in ruins and the people were in distress and had become a reproach, he grieves.
  - 5. He grieves because God's people, his own brethren are struggling, he mourns because God's city is in shambles, and he is emotionally torn because of how the outside community (neighbor nation) is putting them down, and taking advantage of them in their vulnerability. It reflects badly on God.
- C. So Nehemiah does what many of us do when we're distraught over something. He prays to God. He does 3 things in his prayer:
  - 1. The first part is initially surprising to us about a heart that's grieving, but it shows some real perspective on his part—he praises God.
  - 2. Then he *confesses* the people's unfaithfulness.
  - 3. Then he *pleads* for restoration.
- D. Right in the middle of his prayer (Neh. 1:8, 9) Nehemiah said, *"Remember the word that you commanded your servant Moses, saying, 'If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the peoples, <sup>9</sup>but if you return to me and keep my commandments and do them, though your dispersed be under the farthest skies, I will gather them from there and bring them to the place that I have chosen, to make my name dwell there.'"* Nehemiah is praying God's word back to him.
- E. He recounts to God a two-fold promise God made just before the Israelites entered the land of Canaan.
  - 1. "If you're unfaithful Me, I'll scatter you among the nations." (Deut. 28:58, 64)
    - a) <sup>58</sup>*"If you are not careful to do all the words of this law that are written in this book, that you may fear this glorious and awesome name, the LORD your God."*
    - b) <sup>64</sup>*"And the LORD will scatter you among all peoples, from one end of the earth to the other, and there you shall serve other gods of wood and stone, which neither you nor your fathers have known."*

2. "If you repent and obey My voice, I'll restore you and show compassion. (Deut. 30:1-5)  
*<sup>1</sup>"And when all these things come upon you, the blessing and the curse, which I have set before you, and you call them to mind among all the nations where the LORD your God has driven you, <sup>2</sup>and return to the LORD your God, you and your children, and obey his voice in all that I command you today, with all your heart and with all your soul, <sup>3</sup>then the LORD your God will restore your fortunes and have compassion on you, and he will gather you again from all the peoples where the LORD your God has scattered you. <sup>4</sup>If your outcasts are in the uttermost parts of heaven, from there the LORD your God will gather you, and from there he will take you. <sup>5</sup>And the LORD your God will bring you into the land that your fathers possessed, that you may possess it. And he will make you more prosperous and numerous than your fathers."*
  3. Initially, someone quoting scripture like this in a prayer might seem a little strange or awkward for us.
- F. Why did he pray God's words to God?
1. Was he praying for God to remember His words because God had forgotten about His promise to them?
  2. Was he feeling like God was unreliable and had failed to follow through with keeping to His promise?
  3. Definitely not. That's not why He quotes God's word to God in a prayer!
    - a) God had previously spoken of these promises saying, "...then I will remember My covenant with Jacob, and I will remember My covenant with Isaac and My covenant with Abraham, and I will remember the land... But I will for their sake remember the covenant with their forefathers, whom I brought out of the land of Egypt in the sight of the nations, that I might be their God: I am the Lord." (Lev. 26:42, 45)
    - b) God is not speaking of remembering them because He had forgotten. He's bringing them to fulfillment!
  4. So, when Nehemiah calls on God to remember these promises, it's an expression of his faith.
    - a) Nehemiah is embracing God's promise for return and renewal.
    - b) He's calling upon God for the fulfillment of this promise.
    - c) His prayer centered his focus on God's faithfulness. It strengthened his faith, and it gave him hope for the future.

Jonah also quoted scriptures in his prayers to God.

## II. Jonah prayed God's word

- A. The occasion:
  1. Due to Jonah's rebellion, God sends a great storm upon the sea where Jonah was sailing.
  2. At his urging, the sailors toss Jonah overboard.
  3. Suddenly, the waters are calm... but the seas of fear and hopelessness still rage around him.
- B. The 2<sup>nd</sup> chapter of Jonah records a compilation of at least two of his prayers which turn out to be quotations of scripture. They're not his own personally crafted statements. They are either direct quotations from Psalms or are very close to that. (Jonah 2:1-9)
  1. David's words of distress. (Psa. 18:4-6)  
*<sup>4</sup>"The cords of death encompassed me; the torrents of destruction assailed me; <sup>5</sup>the cords of Sheol entangled me; the snares of death confronted me. <sup>6</sup>In my distress I called upon the LORD; to my God I cried for help. From his temple he heard my voice, and my cry to him reached his ears."*

2. Overwhelmed. (Psalm 42:7)  
*"Deep calls to deep at the roar of your waterfalls; all your breakers and your waves have gone over me."*
3. With each of Jonah's statements you can find a very similar verse in Psalms.
- C. Why would Jonah quote from Psalms using the inspired words of someone else when he is drowning in the sea and while he is in the belly of a fish?
  1. Is he avoiding heart-felt prayer?
  2. Don't assume for one moment just because he's quoting the words of other men that he is not praying from his heart.
  3. Would anyone really question the sincerity of someone who cries out to God in the midst of such turmoil like Jonah?
- D. Jonah apparently knew scripture well, and they were constantly on his mind.
  1. We typically think of Psalms as songs, but from an early age Jews quoted Psalms daily and used them in their prayers.
  2. It makes sense that as he is experiencing such a difficult time these words from scripture would come to mind.
- E. So, in his distress, he prays God's word to God because perhaps he could find no better words to express what was on his heart.

### III. Jesus Prayed God's word

- A. The situation: Jesus is experiencing personal suffering while dying on the cross for a world gone wrong.
- B. Jesus uses two passages from Psalms to address the Father.
  1. In Matthew 27:46 Jesus expresses his emotional suffering with words that would ring a lot of bells for the Jews, (Psa. 22) *"My God! My God! Why have You forsaken Me?"*
  2. Then, right before Jesus dies, (Luke 23:46) He quotes from Psalm 31:5, *"Father, 'Into your hand I commit my spirit...'"*
  3. A person's last words are important, so the selection of these would not have been a trivial thing.
  4. We recognized these as prophetic, Messianic Psalms that Jesus is quoting. He's making one final appeal show His crucifiers, and anyone else, that He *IS* the Anointed One of God.
  5. Jesus didn't just speak these words from scripture because He was supposed to say them. He said them because they actually described and expressed His circumstances and His emotions in the moment.
- C. Why would the Son of God need to use David's words instead of His own to speak with the Father?
  1. Psalm 22 describes not only the physical, but also the emotional Jesus faced at the hands of his adversaries. It pictures the suffering Jesus experienced on the cross from *His* perspective.
  2. In Psalm 31, David cries out to God with complete expression of trust in Him despite His troubling circumstances.
    - a) David was surrounded by wicked conspiracies against his life.
    - b) Friends deserted him.
    - c) And, one who was very close to him, most likely Absalom his very own son, turned against him.
    - d) When he says, *"Into Your hand I commit my spirit,"* (v. 5) that's David's way of saying, *"God, I'm trusting you with this. I'm turning this situation over to you with complete trust. It's out of my hands. It's out of my control."*

e) This is exactly what Jesus faced. So by quoting David's words to His father, He is exhibiting the same trust.

Conclusion: Praying God's word might seem different at first, but it carries great power for us.

1. Sometimes our life situations relate very well to a statement in scripture, or it expresses our feelings better than we can in the moment.
2. Romans 8:26 says, "...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." Isn't that comforting to know?
3. But also, in the Bible we have inspired groanings we can use in our prayers.
4. Psalms is a great place to turn when we are looking for words to express our innermost feelings to the Lord.
5. The early Christians used this same approach as their lives were turned on end by persecution. (cf. Acts 4:23-31)
6. Many Psalms contain *beautiful* words of praise to God that we could all utilize in our prayers.
7. Psalms of confession, like Psalm 51, could be used when seeking forgiveness from God.
8. Many other Psalms are cries for help that could be prayed when one is sick or suffering physical hardships. Some are pleas by David for mercy and deliverance from his adversaries which could be helpful if you're being ill-treated by other people.
9. Regardless of whether it's joy or grief, fear or security, praise or doubt, there are many Psalms (and other scriptures) we can use to express our hearts to God.
10. Praying God's word is not a matter of "vain repetition" or feeling God has forgotten. Praying God's word is a matter of faith in Him.