

Isaiah Chapter 28 the Mystery of Prayer

by A.B. Simpson

Isaiah teaches us that God is the Hearer and Answerer of prayer, and that prayer has its hindrances as well as its encouragements.

Scripture: Isaiah 40:31, Isaiah 55:6, Isaiah 58:9, Isaiah 62:6-7, Isaiah 65:24

Topics: "The Power of Prayer", "The Nature of God as a Hearer"

Description

A.B. Simpson explores the profound teachings of Isaiah on prayer, emphasizing that God is both the Hearer and Answerer of our prayers, always attentive to our needs even before we ask. He highlights the hindrances to prayer, such as sin and indolence, and illustrates the importance of fervent, active prayer as a means of spiritual engagement. Simpson also presents Jesus as the ultimate Intercessor, whose ministry of prayer empowers believers to engage in persistent prayer for God's purposes. He encourages the faithful to approach God with confidence, claiming His promises, and to seek Him earnestly, especially in repentance, as the foundation for effective prayer.

Transcript

What does Isaiah teach us about prayer?

I. That God is the Hearer and Answerer of prayer. "Then you will call and the Lord will answer; you will cry and He will say: Here I am." (Isa. 58: 9). "And it will come to pass that before they call, I will answer: and while they are yet speaking I will hear." (Is. 65: 24.)

These verses assure us that our God is no isolated despot, indifferent to the needs and conditions of His creatures, but a loving Father, sensitive to every want and sorrow of His suffering children. How beautiful these promises of prayer! First He says He will answer. Then not only will He answer, but He will come. "He Will say, Here I am." Next, "Before they call I will answer," He tells us, and "while they are yet speaking, I will hear." Not only will He wait and listen to our appeal, but He will anticipate our need and put the prayer Himself upon our hearts or send the blessing before we ask it. How beautifully this is illustrated in the Savior's thoughtful love towards Simon Peter. Fretting about their taxes which Peter had not the means to pay, we are told that the Lord "prevented him" and sent him down to the sea to find the fish with the golden coin in its mouth and then to bring it and pay the claim for Him and them. He did not wait for Peter to ask for it. He did not allow him to be embarrassed, but His loving forethought anticipated the need. So He is ever loving and caring for us, and as the Psalmist expresses it, "You prevent us with the blessings of goodness."

The last of these promises, "While they are yet speaking, I will hear," finds a striking illustration in the message of God to Daniel during his long fast and prayer. "At the beginning of your message and supplication," the angel says, "the commandment came forth." God does not wait until we have teased or coaxed Him into compliance with our wishes, but the answer comes with the prayer, and it is our privilege to believe that when we ask we do receive the things for which we pray. Indeed, prayer is as much a receiving as an asking, and in the very exercise of our communion with heaven, our hearts are comforted and filled and the blessing comes while we wait.

II. Isaiah teaches us that prayer has its hindrances as well as its encouragements. The first of these is sin. "Behold the Lord's hand is not shortened that it cannot save; neither His ear heavy that it cannot hear; but your iniquities have separated between you and your God and your sins have hid His face from you that He will not hear. God cannot recognize sin or hear us if we regard iniquity in our hearts. A willful indulgence in and tolerance of sin destroys every feeling of confidence and renders it impossible for us truly to pray. Let us see to it that every forbidden and doubtful thing is put aside, and "if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God. And whatsoever we ask we receive of Him, because we keep His commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in His sight."

Indolence is also a hindrance to prayer. "And there is none that calls upon Your name, that stirs up himself to take hold of You: for You have hid Your face from us and have consumed us because of our iniquities." Prayer is recognized here as an intense and active energy of the soul. It is called in James "the effectual fervent prayer," which has real force in it. Many of us are too easy, too self-complacent and contented to know much of the power of prayer. It means the waking up of all our being and the intense earnestness of our spirit in pressing through difficulties to God and fighting the good fight of faith with perseverance and power. We often misinterpret the incident of Jacob at Peniel as though the wrestling were all by the angel. It is true that the angel was wrestling with Jacob, to break down his self-sufficiency and subdue his carnal strength, but Jacob was wrestling with the angel, too, and crying out, "I will not let you go except you bless me." Both experiences are true. Each has its place and the truth lies between the two extremes of passive waiting for God and active taking hold of God and stirring up ourselves in the victorious conflict of prevailing prayer. There is no such intense exercise of soul as real prayer, and it wakes up every dormant faculty of our being and puts us in the place where God can pour His life into us and use us as the instruments of His power.

III. The great object-lesson of prayer.

Isaiah gives a picture of the great Intercessor, the Lord Jesus Christ. "And He saw that there was no man and wondered that there was no intercessor: therefore His arm brought salvation unto Him and His righteousness, it sustained Him." Here we find our great High Priest entering upon His mighty ministry of intercession and a little later, in Isaiah 62:1, we hear Him devoting Himself to the long conflict which was not to cease until Zion's deliverance was complete. "For Zion's sake will I not hold My peace and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest until the righteousness thereof go forth as brightness and the salvation thereof as a lamp that burns." Have we duly considered that the supreme ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ is prayer? He spent three and one-half years in active work and suffering, but He has spent nineteen hundred years in intercession for His people. What a significance, what a majesty, what a power, this gives to the ministry of prayer! The reason is that the spiritual creation is not like the natural. The worlds of space are made by the hand of God, but the church is born of His heart. He had but to put forth a single command and the sun and stars sprang into being, but before a soul can be restored to His image and the work of redemption be consummated, His own heart has to travail in birth in agonies of love, and one by

one each of us has to come forth from His very being born of love travail and pain. This is the ministry that Christ is carrying on. Therefore, it comes to pass that prayer is the secret force of everything in the spiritual kingdom. This great ministry of prayer begins in the bosom of Jesus, but is by Him transferred through the Holy Ghost to the heart of His church and carried on by us in the ministry of prayer on earth.

IV. This brings us to the conflict of prayer.

"I have set watchmen upon your walls O Jerusalem, which shall never hold their peace day nor night: you that make mention of the Lord, keep not silence; and give Him no rest until He establishes and until He makes Jerusalem a praise in the earth." (Isa. 62: 6, 7.) Here we find the same language employed by Christ in the first verse reechoed by His people. His prayer is passed on to us and by us passed back to Him. Like His, our conflict is to be deep and long. We are to "keep not silence and give Him no rest until He establishes and makes Jerusalem a praise in the earth."

Why this unceasing prayer? Why cannot we ask and then believe it has come and change our prayer to praise? Because it is through the very agency of prayer that the forces are set in motion which accomplish the answer. Natural science tells us that all the effects of light, heat and sound are produced by constant motion in the atoms and elements of matter. The ether is in intense vibration, and forth from this come the blue sky of heaven, the tinted clouds, the glorious sunshine, the harmonies of music, the waves of heat. Look through a microscope at a drop of water and you will behold every particle and atom in constant circulation moving and moving evermore, and as it moves, developing into new forms of life, the very movement is the process of each new development. So it is in spiritual activity that God works. The stagnant heart is like a corpse or a cemetery. It is the active, intense cooperating spirit through whom He works and moves. Prayer, therefore, is that spiritual law of the fitness of things which puts our spirit in touch with the activities of the Holy Ghost. Prayer, therefore, is an actual force in the spiritual world. It not only moves God, but it moves things.

Science tells us how a single chord of music prolonged without cessation will crumble to dust a stone wall. The old myth of the fiddler fiddling down the bridge is not a fancy. There are musical chords which, if sustained, will break to pieces the strongest material forms. Therefore, passing through the Alps, every voice is hushed, a single sound would dislodge the avalanche and hurl it upon the traveler's head.

So in the spiritual world prayer is a potency that shakes the foundations of the kingdoms of darkness, that moves the hearts of men and that works out the will of God.

Oh, praying ones, ring out the bells, prolong the notes, let the trumpets resound around the walls of Jericho and they will surely fall. This is the prayer of which the Master speaks when he says, "Knock and it shall be opened." If we let Him teach us this mystery and ministry of spiritual power, then indeed shall the weapons of our warfare be mighty, pulling down strongholds and fulfilling God's majestic promise, "Call unto Me and I will answer you and show you great and mighty things which you knew not."

V. The confidence of prayer. "This says the Lord, the Holy One of Israel, and his Maker; ask Me of things to come concerning my sons and concerning the work of my hands command you Me." Prayer is here connected with the vision of God's plan for His people and His work. First we are to ask of things concerning His sons. We are to look to Him for a revelation of His purpose for His work and the world. God does give such visions of faith to waking souls. He does forecast the things He is waiting to do for us and then He bids us claim its actual fulfillment, and adds this mighty command: "Concerning the work of My hands, command you Me." In the name of Jesus we are to not only ask, but claim and pass in the orders

of faith to the bank of heaven. The Master Himself has said, "If you abide in Me and My words abide in you, you shall ask what you will," or, as one has translated it, "You shall ask what you command," "and it shall be done unto you."

This is a very high place to give to prayer, but we may take it in fellowship with Jesus.

"Fear not to take your place with Jesus on the throne,

And bid the powers of earth and hell His sovereign scepter own;

Your full redemption rights with holy boldness claim,

And to His utmost fulness prove the power of Jesus' name."

VI. The communion of prayer.

"But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run and not be weary; and they shall walk and not faint." (Isa. 40: 31.)

This is not the prayer that asks for things, but silently receives from Him His life and strength until the spirit soars with eagle's wings and then goes forth "to run and not be weary and to walk and not faint." This is the kind of prayer that comforts the sorrowing, rests the weary, refreshes the thirsty soul and brings heaven down to fill our hearts here below. It is the fellowship of prayer; the silence of prayer; the secret place of the Most High. Happy they who have found the key and learned the secret and whose life is "hid with Christ in God."

VII. The sinner's prayer. "Seek the Lord while He may be found, call upon Him while He is near: let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts and let him return unto the Lord and He will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon."

This is the only prayer which the sinner may offer. All other prayers are useless until we begin here. God does not want your worship, your ceremonies, your many prayers. There is but one prayer for you, and that is, "Seek the Lord while He may be found; call upon Him while He is near." Bring the prayer of the penitent sinner, "God be merciful to me, a sinner." Until you offer that, all your other prayers are vain. Not until you accept the Savior and come to God in His name can you worship Him acceptably and pray effectually.

Come, therefore, in penitence for mercy and salvation and enter in through the door, and then you shall have access to the Father's house and all the privileges and promises of the throne of grace. But come now, while He is near. Seek Him at once, while He may be found. Do not put aside the gentle hand that is touching your shoulder. Do not refuse to grasp the silken cord that is dropped down to you from heaven, and if you seize it, has power to lift you to the skies. Do not trifle with the impressions that God has given you, for impressions are solemn things, but meet the touch that is drawing you to Him; answer to the call which is breathing on your heart; pray the prayer which He has prescribed for such as you and you will find that "He will have mercy upon you and abundantly pardon," and He will lead you on to those higher ministries of prayer which will enable you to give to others the blessing that has made God so real to you.

"Lord, teach us to pray."

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