

# The Prayers of the Saints

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] Well, if we could, this evening, for a short while, with the Lord's help and the Lord's enabling, if we could turn back to that portion of scripture that we read, Revelation chapter 8.

We're working our way through the book of Revelation. I hope to get to the end at some point, but we're not even halfway yet, which is great.

There's lots to go. Revelation chapter 8, so we're reading from the beginning. When the Lamb opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour.

Then I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and seven trumpets were given to them. And another angel came and stood at the altar with a golden censer, and he was given much incense to offer with the prayers of all the saints on the golden altar before the throne.

And the smoke of the incense with the prayers of the saints rose before God from the hand of the angel. And so on.

[ 1 : 1 2 ] As you know, for many of us here this evening, we had the privilege of being brought up in a Christian home with Christian parents.

Not all of us had that privilege, but many of us did. Now, even if we didn't have the privilege of Christian parents, many of us had the influence of Christian grandparents or even Christian family members.

And it was a privilege that many others didn't have. And yet we were graciously given the opportunity to be taught the gospel from a young age. And more than that, we were taught the importance of reading the Bible, the importance of prayer, the importance of attending church, and even the importance of learning the catechism.

Of course, at the time when we were young, most of us would have admitted that we didn't see it as a privilege. That wasn't until we came to faith. And then we realized how much a privilege it was to be brought up in a Christian home.

Joel Beakey, he had the same privilege. He describes the occasion when his Christian father spoke to him about the importance of prayer.

[ 2 : 2 6 ] And he writes, When I was a boy, my dad once said to me, Son, do you know what a child of God always possesses that the unconverted person doesn't have?

He says, a child of God always has a place to go. My dad, writes Beakey, then proceeded to tell me that, There's nothing so valuable in all the earth as an open throne of grace.

That prayer was more valuable than all the money in the world. And to neglect prayer was to neglect one of the greatest privileges we have on earth. Prayer is the thermometer of our spiritual life and the breath of our soul.

Through it we commune with God who communes with us through his word. And then in true preaching fashion, Joel Beakey applies his personal illustration in his commentary by asking very personal and very probing questions.

What is your prayer life like? Do you truly believe in prayer? Could you go a week without praying?

- [ 3 : 41 ] I know they're personal and probing questions, but they're important for us to consider. Especially when last Sunday morning we were considering the question my good friend J.C. Ryle asked, the question for everybody, do you pray?
- Do you pray? But this evening, the opening verses of Revelation chapter 8, they aren't asking us, do you pray? They're actually showing us that our prayers are precious to God.
- Our prayers are precious to God. And so I want us to consider the preciousness of our prayers this evening. And I want us just to think about the opening four verses of chapter 8 or verses 2 to 4 even, under two headings.
- The purpose of prayer and the presentation of prayer. So the purpose of prayer and the presentation of prayer. So first of all we see the purpose of prayer.
- We read there at the beginning of chapter 8, When the Lamb opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour. Then I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and seven trumpets were given to them.
- [ 4 : 51 ] And another angel came and stood at the altar with a golden censer. And he was given much incense to offer with the prayers of all the saints on the golden altar before the throne.
- And the smoke of the incense with the prayers of the saints rose before God from the hand of the angel. Now last Wednesday evening we saw that Revelation chapter 8, it starts with this scene of silence.
- It starts with a scene of silence. That's what we read there, When the Lamb opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour. But as you know, as we've been going through this wonderful revelation, The book of Revelation, it's one long revelation.
- It's from Jesus Christ, it's about Jesus Christ, and it's for the church of Jesus Christ. And this revelation is important to the church. It's important to the church of Jesus Christ because it gradually and gloriously, as we've seen, It reveals Jesus to us as a risen, ruling, and reigning king who is going to return.
- And this is made clear to us when the Apostle John, when he receives this revelation of a throne in heaven. We're made to see how glorious Jesus really is.
- [ 6 : 09 ] And we're given this vision of the throne of heaven with God the Father seated upon the throne With that sovereign seal in his right hand. And that seal is sealed with seven seals.
- That scroll is sealed with seven seals. And the only one who's worthy to open the scroll and break the seals is the sinless, spotless Lamb of God. And you'll remember that the first seal, it revealed the white horse of victory.
- The second seal was the red horse of persecution. The third seal was the black horse of poverty. The fourth seal was the pale horse of death. The fifth seal was God's justice for the martyred saints.
- The sixth seal revealed God's judgment of sinners. And all the time, as we saw last Wednesday evening, all the time heaven is a picture of praise.
- Because as each seal upon the sovereign scroll in the right hand of the one seated upon the throne, As each seal has been opened, the singers are becoming more and more.
- [ 7 : 14 ] The choir is getting greater and greater. Because we're told that there's 24 elders singing. There's four living creatures singing. There's thousands and thousands and myriads and myriads of angels singing.
- The whole of creation is singing. The multitude which no man can number is singing. They're all singing around the throne of heaven. And as each seal upon the sovereign scroll is opened, This heavenly choir is getting bigger and bigger.

The singing is getting louder and louder. The volume is rising higher and higher. But as soon as the seventh seal upon the sovereign scroll is opened, We're told there in verse 1, There is silence.

There is silence in heaven. For about half an hour. And as we said last week, The silence in heaven was a stunned silence.

It was a solemn silence. And it was a stunned and solemn silence Because the seventh seal revealed God's divine and definite judgment against sin.

[ 8 : 23 ] You know, you could even say it was an eerie silence. Maybe similar to the silence that would have been experienced at Calvary. You know, when Jesus encountered and experienced that divine and definite judgment of God Against our sin on the cross.

You remember that at the sixth hour of the day, When the midday sun was meant to be at its highest and at its hottest. And yet when Jesus is experiencing God's judgment, The world is plunged into this deep darkness.

And in the darkness, You could almost see that Calvary responds with this stunned and solemn silence at the cross.

And here in a similar way, As the seventh seal on the sovereign scroll is opened to reveal the judgment of God, The definite and divine judgment of God, Heaven responds with silence.

A stunned and solemn silence. The whole of heaven has been shown who God really is And what God is going to do. And they're being told, Be still.

[ 9 : 39 ] Be still and know that I am God. Then John says, Verse 2, Then I saw the seven angels who stand before God, And seven trumpets were given to them.

The seven angels were given seven trumpets In order to announce God's divine and definite judgment. We'll come to that, God willing, Over the coming weeks.

And we hear each trumpet being blown As we go throughout chapters 8 and also into chapter 9. But before the seven angels begin blowing these seven trumpets of judgment, Our New Testament scholar, I mentioned him last Wednesday evening, Gregory Beale, He explains that the silence, This silence, This stillness, This solemn silence in heaven, It opens a way for the church's prayers to reach the throne of grace.

And this is what he writes. He says, God stills heaven. In order to hear the prayers of his children. It's an amazing thought.

God stills heaven to hear the prayers of his children. And as heaven stands silent and still before the Lord, The Lord is hearing the precious prayers of the saints.

[ 11 : 03 ] And what it ought to show us is the purpose of prayer. The purpose of prayer. Especially when, As we've seen in this scene, This heavenly scene, The sovereign scroll, Which had been sealed with seven seals, It is now open.

The right, There was writing on the back, We're told, And on the front. And as you know, That sovereign scroll, In the right hand of the one, Seated upon the throne of heaven, It contained that complete and comprehensive plan of God's eternal decrees for this world.

In fact, It was an inspired and inerrant and infallible plan written on this scroll. It was a perfect plan. As we said before, There were no omissions on it.

There were no oversights on it. No additions to it. No amendments. No alterations. Everything was on this perfect plan. It was a detailed and decreed plan, With a perfect purpose, And a perfect providence for everything.

And it was in the hand of the one who was sovereign, superior, and supreme, And seated upon the throne of heaven. Therefore, when the Lamb takes the scroll, As we've seen in this scene, When the Lamb takes the scroll, And opens all these seals, He is fulfilling the eternal decrees of God.

[ 12 : 22 ] He's fulfilling the complete and comprehensive plan, And purpose, And providence, Of the one seated on the throne. Which immediately raises the question about the prayers of the saints.

What is the purpose of prayer? What is the purpose of prayer? Because if God is sovereign, superior, and supreme, Which he is, And if God knows what we're going to ask for, Before we ask it, Which he does, And if God has planned the answer, And outcome, Before even the foundation, Of the world which he has, What is the purpose, Of us opening our mouths, In prayer?

What is the purpose of prayer? And you know, In his book, If God Already Knows Why Pray, What a great title to our book, If God Already Knows Why Pray, Douglas Kelly in his book, He explains that, We are to view our prayers, As part of the eternal decrees, Of God.

That's how precious your prayers are. We are to view our prayers, As part of the eternal decrees, Of God.

Because God in his sovereignty, And let's remember, God is absolutely sovereign, Over the minutest detail of our lives.

[ 13 : 52 ] God in his sovereignty, Has not only decreed what will happen, He has also decreed that our prayers, Should be the means, By which these things happen. I'll say that again, God in his sovereignty, Has not only decreed what will happen, He's also decreed that our prayers, Should be the means, By which these things happen.

And you know, That's the beauty, That's the wonder, That's the mystery of prayer. God has not only ordained the end, He's also ordained the means to the end. The same is also true of preaching, And evangelism.

God in his sovereignty, Has chosen the elect. They are elect from before the foundation, Of the world. And he chose them, Not because of any goodness, Or greatness in them, But because of his goodness, And his greatness, And his graciousness, Towards them.

God has chosen, An innumerable multitude, Which no man can number, To be saved and set apart, And sanctified, For his glory. You might then ask, Well, Why preach the gospel?

Why bother preaching the gospel? Why trouble ourselves, To evangelize the lost? Why go out of our way, To invite people to church? Why make the effort, To speak to someone at work, Or witness to our, Unconverted family, Or friends, Or neighbours?

[ 15 : 18 ] Why bother, If God has chosen them? Why do we need, To call them, To repent? But of course, Like it is with prayer, God has not only decreed, Who are to be saved, He has also decreed, How they are to be saved.

God has not only ordained the end, He's also ordained, The means to the end. Because God is pleased, To work through means. And the means are you and I.

God is pleased, To work through means. Whether it's the preaching of the gospel, Or the invitation to church, Or the witness to the Lord, Witness of the Lord's people, Or even the power of prayer, God is pleased, To work through means.

And so when it comes to prayer, God uses the precious prayers of the saints. God uses your precious prayers, As the means to carry out, His perfect plan, And purpose.

It should blow your mind, That God would use our prayers, As the means to carry out, His perfect plan, And His perfect purpose.

[ 16 : 35 ] In his commentary, And I'm sorry for quoting Joel Beakey so often, But his commentary is just so good. He writes, Prayer doesn't twist God's arm, To induce him to change his mind.

Prayer changes our mind, To bring us in line, With the will of God. And with that, Beakey, He uses this amazing illustration, I think Peter will like the illustration, Because he explains that, When a sailor, Or when someone who has a boat, Throws a rope to the pier, To tie up his boat, The person on the boat, Pulls the rope, As if he were pulling the pier, Towards him.

But in reality, He is pulling the boat, Towards the pier. The same is true, With the purpose of prayer. When we pray, We believe that we are pulling God towards us.

But in reality, We are pulling ourselves towards God. And that's what it means in the Bible, To lay hold of God. We are pulling ourselves towards him.

We're not pulling him to us, We are pulling ourselves to him. We are laying hold of God. Because when we pray, We can't bring God in line with our plans. Instead, When we pray, We bring ourselves in line, With God's eternal decrees.

[ 18 : 02 ] That's why we're taught to pray in the Lord's Prayer. Thy will be done, On earth as it is, In heaven. We are aligning ourselves, With the perfect plan, And purpose, Of God.

That's how precious our prayers are. They are the precious prayers, Of the saints. And so we see that our prayers, The prayers of the saints, They're precious to God, Because of the purpose of prayer.

But then secondly, The presentation of prayer. The presentation of prayer. So the purpose of prayer, And the presentation of prayer. We read there in verse 3, And another angel came and stood at the altar, With a golden censer, And he was given much incense, To offer with the prayers of all the saints, On the golden altar before the throne.

And the smoke of the incense, With the prayers of the saints, Rose before God, From the hand of the angel. So as heaven stands silent for half an hour, To hear the precious prayers of the saints, We know that this is unusual, Because throughout this revelation of heaven, Heaven is being depicted to us, As a place of worship.

As we said, There were the 24 elders singing, The four living creatures singing, The myriads of angels singing, The whole of creation is singing. There's this great noise, This volume of singing, Every, This multitude which no man can number, From every nation, They're all singing.

[ 19 : 38 ] Heaven is described, As a place of worship. But you know, That's emphasized to us, Not only by the singing, And the silence, And the stillness, It's also emphasized to us, By the fact that there's an altar, In heaven.

We know that heaven is a place of worship, Because there is an altar, In heaven. It's not the first time, That the altar is mentioned, Because we're told there in verse 3, That there was much incense, To offer with the prayers of the saints, On the golden altar, Before the throne.

And it's not the first time, We've seen this, Because in the previous chapter, Or chapter 6, When the fifth seal, On the sovereign scroll was opened, John says there, That I saw under the altar, The souls of those, Who had been slain, For the word of God, And for the witness, They had borne.

And you know, The imagery, The illustration, With this altar in heaven, It should bring us back, Immediately, To the tabernacle, Or even the temple. And as you know, The tabernacle was a place of worship, It was a place of worship, In the wilderness.

And you remember the layout, Or the furniture of the tabernacle, We studied the tabernacle, Probably a number of years ago now, But you remember, If you remember the layout, Of the tabernacle, Because as you entered the tabernacle, From the outer court, The outer court, There was the, The brazen altar, Then there was the, The labour where you would wash, Then you'd go through, Into the holy place, And on your left hand side, Would be the golden lamp stand, And on your right hand side, Would be the table of showbread, They were both, Pointers to Jesus, He was the light of the world, And he is the bread of life, Jesus is our, Tabernacle, In fact, John says in his gospel, That when the word became flesh, And dwelt among us, He tabernacled, Among us, Because Jesus, Is our tabernacle, And so in the holy place, You have the golden lamp stand, To your left, Which points to Jesus, As the light of the world, You have the table of showbread, On your right, Which points to Jesus, As the bread of life,

[ 21 : 50 ] But then directly in front of you, If you're in the holy place, You see right in front of you, This altar, And it would sit, Just behind, Or just in front of, The curtain, The curtain behind, Which God dwelt, In the holy, Of holies, He dwelt between the cherubim, On his throne, On the ark of the covenant, And directly in front of God's throne, Was this altar, This altar of incense, Which, Was a completely different altar, To the bronze altar, That was outside, In the courtyard, This altar, Was an altar of incense, It was a small golden altar, Fascinating when you look at it, And upon that altar, Day and night, Was this sweet smelling incense, That was being burnt, Continually, And that continual fragrance, And offering of incense, To God,

It was a picture of Jesus, Just like the lamp stand, And the table of showbread, It's a picture of Jesus' Continual intercession, For his people, He is our great high priest, Says the writer to the Hebrews, He ever lives to make intercession, For us, And that's what we're seeing here, In this revelation, Because when we're told there in verse 3, That another angel, And you'll notice, It's another angel came, And stood at the altar, That angel is different, To the myriads and myriads of angels, Around the throne, That angel is distinct, From the seven angels, Who were given the seven trumpets, Because the other, Or another angel, Is Jesus, He is the great high priest, And we know it's Jesus there, When it says another angel, Because that's how he was described, In the previous chapter, He's described in chapter 7, Where it says that,

Another angel ascending, From the rising of the sun, With the seal, Of the living God, Therefore the another angel, Is Jesus, He's our great high priest, More than that, And this is what I love about the Bible, All the words are so important, The word angel means, Messenger, Simply means, Messenger, That's the role and responsibility, Jesus has, Right here, In this scene, He's God's messenger, Because as God's messenger, He's bringing a message, He's carrying a message, And he's carrying a message, Just like the high priest would carry it, On that great day, The day of atonement, Because you remember, On that one day of the year, That great day, Where it's described in Leviticus 16, The high priest, He would enter, Into the most holy place, He was permitted, To enter within the veil, Into the holy of holies, Before the throne, Of God,

And the high priest, The first thing he would take, Into the holy of holies, Was the golden censer, With the burning incense, That had just come off, The altar of incense, And he would carry it in, Behind the veil, Into the holy of holies, And lay it down, Right in front, Of the ark, Of the covenant, Right in front of God's throne, He would bring it, From off the altar, Through the veil, To the throne of God, And put it down, And as the high priest, Lay the golden censer, Down before the ark, Of the covenant, That sweet smelling, Smelling incense, Would not only fill, The entire womb, This small box shape, In the holy of holies, But it would rise, As it were, Before the throne, Of God, And that's what we've been told here, That's the image, We should have in our mind, As we look at these verses, This image, Of the golden censer, In front of God's throne,

Jesus doing it, Another angel came, And stood at the altar, With a golden censer, He had given, He was given much incense, To offer with the prayers, Of all the saints, On the golden altar, Before the throne, And the smoke of the incense, With the prayers, Of the saints, Rose before God, From the hand, Of the angel, And you know, You look at it, And you think, Well here is Jesus, You want to know, What Jesus is doing tonight, Here he is, Here is our angel, Our messenger, Our intercessor, Our mediator, Between God and men, Our advocate, With the father, Jesus Christ the righteous, Our great high priest, You want to know, What he is doing tonight, He is carrying, The golden censer, From off the altar, Of incense, Containing the precious prayers, Of the saints, And he presents them, Right to the throne, Of God,

[ 26 : 56 ] Isn't that amazing, That is what he does, With our prayers, And they are presented, To the throne of God, As a sweet, Smelling, Fragrance, And you know, What is so beautiful, About the intercession of Christ, Is that he takes, Our sinful prayers, And our selfish prayers, And our stained prayers, And our stuttering prayers, And our stammering prayers, And he mixes them, And he mingles them, Just like it's there, In the passage, He mixes them, And he mingles them, With his intercessory incense, So that they are made acceptable, Before the holy throne, Of God, Spurgeon, Well, You can never go wrong, Quoting Spurgeon, He says, Christ's incense, Completely absorbs, What is earthly, Fleshly, Sinful, And selfish, In the prayers, Of the saints, And he infuses,

Their prayer, With a sweet, Smelling savour, That is pleasing, To the nostrils, Of God, And you know, What an encouragement, What an encouragement here, To read of this, What an encouragement, For the church of Jesus Christ, To read this, That God has stilled heaven, In order to hear, The precious prayers, Of the saints, What an encouragement, For the Lord's people, To be reminded, And reassured, That in the midst of opposition, And obstacles, And sin, And suffering, And sickness, And sorrow, What an encouragement, To be reminded, To remain focused, And to remain faithful, To Jesus, What an encouragement, To tell us, To stop looking inwards, And keep looking upwards, Keep lifting our eyes, To the one who is in heaven, Whoever lives, To make intercession for us, Because, As we're being told here, There is a purpose in prayer, We might think, Oh my prayers are useless,

But you know, There's a purpose in prayer, There's a purpose in the prayer meeting, There's a purpose in the prayers of the saints, Because no matter how feeble, Or how faltering, Our prayers often feel, Our precious prayers, Our pleas to God, Our tears before the throne of grace, They are presented, Into the throne room of heaven, As a sweet smelling savor to God, By our great high priest, Who ever lives, To make intercession, For us, What an encouragement, And you know what we've been told in this passage, Keep praying, Keep praying, Keep praying for your family, Who are still out of Christ, Keep praying for your children, And your grandchildren, Keep praying for your husband, Or your wife, Keep praying for your friends,

That you speak to so often, Keep praying for your neighbours, That you see over the fence all the time, Keep praying for your work colleagues, That speak so foully, Around you, Keep praying for your congregation, Keep praying for your community, Keep praying, Because Jesus promises, As he does here in these verses, He promises to present our prayers, The prayers of the saints, Before God's throne, As a sweet smelling savor, To his nostrils, It should be a great encouragement to us, To keep on praying, So my friend, Do not stop praying, Keep praying before the throne of grace, Because he promises to hear, And he promises to answer, Well may the Lord bless, These thoughts to us, Let us pray, O Lord our gracious God, We give thanks to thee,

For the privilege of prayer, That we have access, To the throne of grace, And to know that even our prayers, That they often, Feel like they are rising, Before thee like black smoke, And yet Lord we bless thee, And praise thee, That through Christ, Our great high priest, That they are presented, Before thy throne, As a sweet smelling savor, Lord help us to see, That thou art sovereign, That thou art the God, Who is in control, The God who knows, Even what we are praying for, Before we utter a word, And to know that even our prayers, Are part of thy perfect plan, That thou art the God, Who is working, All things together for good, To those who are the called, According to thine own purpose, Help us then to pray, And to be faithful in prayer, To be continuing instant in prayer, And to realise that it is, A wonderful privilege,

[ 32 : 02 ] To know that the God of heaven, The maker of heaven and earth, The one who sustains us, By his own righteous right hand, And yet we are able to speak to him, And address him as our father, Which art in heaven, Lord forgive us, We pray, For our lack of faith, Forgive us Lord, For the times we think, That our prayers are not being heard, And yet there are one who knows, Even the sighs, And the groans, And the tears, And the utterances, That no one else can see, And no one else can understand, Lord go before us we plead, Teach us day by day, Keep us Lord ever looking to Jesus, That we may know him, And continue to cling to him, As the author and the finisher, Of our faith, Do us good we ask, For we ask it in Jesus name, And for his sake, Amen, Well we bring our service,

To a conclusion this evening, We're going to sing the words, Of Psalm 28, Psalm 28, In the Scottish Psalter, Page 238, Psalm 28, We're singing from verse 6, Down to the end of the psalm, As we said, All our psalms, They focus upon the theme of prayer, And the psalmist here, He praises God, For hearing his prayer, He says there in verse 6, Forever blessed be the Lord, For graciously he heard, The voice of my petitions, And prayers did regard, The Lord's my strength and shield, My heart upon him did rely, And I am helped, Hence my heart, Doth joy exceedingly, So we'll sing down to the end of the psalm, Of Psalm 28, From verse 6 to 9, To God's praise, Forever blessed,

Blessed be the Lord, For graciously he heard, The voice of my petitions, And prayers did regard, The Lord's my strength and shield, My heart upon him did we die, On thy own helmet, Hence my heart,

The joy exceedingly, And with my song, I will embrace, Their strength is God alone, He also is the saving strength, Of his anointed one, For thine own people, O thine own people, Do thou say, Bless thine in heaven,

For let us, For the Lord's name, For the Lord's name, And with my heart, For the Lord's name, For the Lord's name, forevermore at last.

[ 36 : 40 ] The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and forevermore. Amen.