



There is No Power in Prayer

Nehemiah 1:5-11

NEHEMIAH'S GOD

There is no power in prayer.

What an odd thing to say in a Bible study! Many people will talk about the "power of prayer." But let me clarify...

THERE IS ONLY POWER (OR LACK THEREOF) IN THE OBJECT OF PRAYER." For example, I can call my

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son Caleb's baseball bat "God" and pray to it and ask for it to do some miraculous things. No matter how much praying or even how much faith I may have, I guarantee that that prayer is useless.

Nehemiah knew to Whom he was speaking. Read Nehemiah's prayer below and notice the Object of his prayer:

Nehemiah 1

⁵And I said: "I pray, LORD God of heaven, O great and awesome God, You who keep Your covenant and mercy with those who love You and observe Your commandments, ⁶please let Your ear be attentive and Your eyes open, that You may hear the prayer of Your servant which I pray before You now, day and night, for the children of Israel Your servants, and confess the sins of the children of Israel which we have sinned against You. Both my father's house and I have sinned.

⁷We have acted very corruptly against You, and have not kept the commandments, the statutes, nor the ordinances which You commanded Your servant Moses.

⁸Remember, I pray, the word that You commanded Your servant Moses, saying, 'If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the nations; ⁹but if you return to Me, and keep My commandments and do them, though some of you were cast out to the farthest part of the heavens, yet I will gather them from there, and bring them to the place which I have chosen as a dwelling for My name.'

¹⁰Now these are Your servants and Your people, whom You have redeemed by Your great power, and by Your strong hand.

¹¹O Lord, I pray, please let Your ear be attentive to the prayer of Your servant, and to the prayer of Your servants who desire to fear Your name; and let Your servant prosper this day, I pray, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man." For I was the king's cupbearer.

Nehemiah knew to Whom he was speaking. He was approaching God from a foreign and isolated land. He had been under the influence of the Babylonians. They had a God on every corner. Astrology and all its spin-off ideas originated there. Yet Nehemiah's view of God contained the majesty and Holiness of God.

The phrase "**Lord God of heaven, O great and awesome God**" includes the idea that God is wholly totally all-powerful, God is the biggest version of what we can conceive.

PRAYER'S PURPOSE #1

Prayer is designed to lead us to a more accurate and appropriate view of God. As we worship Him and show Him **Adoration** through prayer, we are reminded or recognize more clearly Who He is in all of His splendor.

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Nehemiah prayed,

... Lord God of heaven ...

The phrase "**Lord God of heaven**" is not so much a reference to God's address as it is to His attributes. "In the heavens" refers to His elevation above all creation. He is transcendent; above; majestic; sovereign.

J. I. Packer wrote, in *A Passion For Faithfulness*, that Nehemiah, *...had grasped the greatness of God.*

This kind of perspective leads to the right kind of priority of God's ownership and control. It also leads to **Confession** because it illuminates even more the chasm between us and God and how far we fall short.

PRAYER'S PURPOSE #2

So prayer is designed to also lead us to a more accurate and appropriate view of man and in particular ourselves.

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Notice that Nehemiah did not say, “Lord, I’ve made a few mistakes recently . . . I really flubbed up today . . . You know me and my indiscretion . . . You probably heard me tell that little white lie . . . You know how flexible my expense reports are . . . And I suppose you saw my little episode of righteous indignation. Lord, you know how I am . . .”

God does not forgive excuses, He forgives sin.

And maybe we shouldn’t just stop with the word “sin.” If you have trouble saying that little word, notice what Nehemiah goes on to say in **verse 7**,

“We have acted very corruptly against You, and have not kept the commandments, the statutes, nor the ordinances which You commanded Your servant Moses.”

He says, “We are guilty of sin, of corruption, of disobedience, and of breaking the Law.” Did he leave anything out?! There are no loopholes in his prayer.

David wrote in his prayer of confession in **Psalm 51:17**

The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart...

Brokenhearted people are used by God to restore a broken world. Why? Because they have come to see His greatness, and they have come to admit their guilt.

Notice what Nehemiah did. He saw God. He confessed. Then he talked to God about God’s Own promises. He said,

8Remember, I pray, the word that You commanded Your servant Moses, saying, “...”

He knew God’s will because God had told His people His will. Nehemiah was just repeating what He knew about God and His will. His requests came from a heart that was in tune with God’s.

David said in **Psalm 37:4**,

Delight yourself also in the Lord, and He shall give you the desires of your heart.

When our hearts are delighted with God and what He desires, then our desires and His desires will be the same and He is sure to give us what pleases Him. David and Nehemiah counted on it. So can we.

Prayer is ultimately for the sake of God. All things should be for the sake and glory of God. However, what brings glory to God is when His creation has the proper perspective of who we are and Who He is. Prayer does just that. Prayer puts us in the correct posture of recognizing who God is and who we are and our dependence upon Him.

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Prayer also engages us in His agenda and not ours.

This God is not a genie who will give you three wishes if you rub hard enough upon the lamp of prayer. He is not a doting grandfather with lollipops in His pockets. He is not, as one man called Him, “a gumball machine” into which you insert your prayer quarter and get some candy.

This One is seated in the heavens. This One is both loving and terrifying. He is both gracious and holy.

APPLICATION

Do you have a high and lofty view of God, or has He unconsciously become your self-help Genie, your good buddy, your back-up plan when all else fails?

Prayer is simply talking to God. There is no special posture or special language or special tone. The Bible is full of a variety and makes little prescription for externals. The focus seems to be upon the heart. God wants our hearts. He uses prayer to mold our hearts. He wants us to express our hearts to Him so that we can see how He can shape our hearts.

So take time to pray with this as your motivation...to let God have His way with you rather than trying to have your way with God.

Some have found the acronym ACTS to be a helpful reminder guide:

Adoration (worshipping Who God is)

Confession (admitting sin and seeking forgiveness)

Thanksgiving (recognizing all good things come from God)

Supplication (making a request or petition)

SENATE STUDY-Tue, 7:30am: Sen. Hancock’s office

HOUSE STUDY-Wed, 11:30/ Lunch Adjournment: Austin Club

CAPITOL COMMUNITY STUDY-Thu, Noon: Reagan Bldg

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