

SERIES ON THE DOCTRINES OF GRACE
Sermon #17
2 Samuel 7:18-29
13, 1984

May

GOD'S GRACE AND OUR PRAYERS

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We have been considering the doctrines of grace for a number of weeks--sixteen weeks, to be exact. I have done this especially for those of you who have not studied them previously. Leading up to the doctrines of grace, we reviewed some of the wonderful attributes of God as a foundation for our studies. And then we have gotten into these doctrines of grace in as much detail as we can, usually in one week for each one. It is impossible to exhaust any of them. We have looked at what the Word of God says about the nature of man. Then we saw that from eternity past God ordained the salvation of a large group of people, a group which no man can number, called the elect in Scripture. We have also seen that, when the Lord Jesus Christ died on the cross, while His work was of infinite value, He presented a sacrifice to the Father specifically for those whom the Father had chosen. After that we saw that, throughout time, God by His grace has been calling and drawing His elect people to Himself, accomplishing His purposes in every day and generation. And finally, we learned that those who are called of God and redeemed through the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ manifest that by persevering in the faith.

So we see that salvation is not just some haphazard thing with even God Himself wondering who is going to be saved and who is not going to be saved, but God is working out His eternal purposes, established before the foundation of the world, and, without exception, those whom He has chosen and called to Himself are being saved. This is our great assurance as we proclaim the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ to every creature.

I have been following the sermons on the doctrines of grace with a few messages talking about some of the practical results, or some of the practical aspects, of these doctrines of grace because they do raise some questions. I do not suppose that anybody ever accepts these or any other doctrine of Scripture without some struggle, but one place where many of the Lord's people have trouble is with prayer in relation to the doctrines of grace. That is, if God has chosen those who are going to be saved, and they are being saved, then what place do our prayers have

in the work that God is doing? If He is sovereignly working all things out according to the counsel of His will, then what purpose is there in our prayers? Many times we see what appears to be practical conflicts between the doctrines of Scripture and what we are told to do in the Word. But remember that there is no conflict between doctrines in the Word of God, but there are personal and practical

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responsibilities that we have in relation to the truth of God. We may have questions about prayer in relation to the sovereignty of God, and in relation to the eternal purposes of God, but I can certainly testify, and I think that there are many here this morning who could testify, that their understanding of the doctrines of the grace of God has intensified their desire to pray, and strengthened their prayer life rather than weakening it. I want you to see the reason for this from Scripture this morning.

I. WE ARE TO PRAY BECAUSE THE BIBLE COMMANDS US TO DO SO.

There is no doubt but that the Bible teaches us as the people of God that we should pray. That goes without saying, doesn't it? We have a number of passages of Scripture that I could cite to prove that. Prayer is a privilege for the child of God. Actually, the Bible gives no encouragement for people to pray, and to pray with the expectation that their prayers are going to be answered, except for the people of God. It is commanded of the Lord's people. It is not only a privilege, but it is an obligation. It is a responsibility that we have. Samuel, when he was talking to the people of Israel after they had asked for a king so that they could be like other nations, made them realize that they had sinned against the Lord. Nevertheless he told them, "But God forbid that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you" (2 Sam. 12:23). So if you know the Lord Jesus Christ as your personal Saviour and you are not praying--praying faithfully, praying according to the Word of God--you are guilty of sin. Prayerlessness is sinfulness. We are admonished by the Apostle Paul in 1 Thessalonians, chapter 5, and verse 17, to "pray without ceasing." That is, our lives are to be characterized by prayer.

The first thing that identified Saul of Tarsus as having passed from death unto life was when it was said of him, "Behold, he prayeth" (Acts 9:11). Prayer is a distinguishing characteristic of the people of God. After Paul had instructed the Ephesian church concerning the armor that they were to put on in their conflict against the Evil One, he said, "Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and

watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints" (Eph. 6:18). I am sure that many Scriptures come to your own mind as you think about prayer, like: "Be careful for nothing (Paul said to the Philippians); but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:6-7). So the Bible clearly teaches that the people of God are to pray.

II. WE ARE TO PRAY BECAUSE GOD HAS PROMISED TO ANSWER PRAYER.

The second thing that I want to emphasize with you this morning is that the Scriptures teach that God has promised to answer prayer.

I want to remind you of some passages where the Lord promised to answer prayer, and I am going to ask you to turn to them, if you will. Please turn to the fourteenth chapter of the Gospel according to John. The last time that the Lord was with His disciples before the Cross concerning which we have any extended record of what He had to say was in the Upper Room. The Biblical account is given in John 14, 15, and 16. One of the things that the Lord Jesus Christ emphasized was prayer. He not only emphasized prayer, but He taught that we should pray expecting that our prayers would be answered. In John 14, verse 13, look at this amazing promise:

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"And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son."

Then look at the fifteenth chapter of John, and the seventh verse: "If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you." Notice: "It shall be done unto you."

And then in the sixteenth chapter of John, the twenty-third and twenty-fourth verses: "And in that day ye shall ask me nothing. Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you. Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name: ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full."

So here are some wonderful promises that God has given us in His Word, promises that prayer will be answered, the very words of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself.

James tells us in James, chapter five, and verse sixteen that "The

effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much." We could go back into the Old Testament and find a number of wonderful promises that are given. I love that verse, Jeremiah 33:3, where the Lord said, "Call unto me, and I will answer thee, and shew thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not." So our praying is not just simply an exercise, a meaningless exercise, but it is a mighty power that the child of God can wield. And we must not only pray, but we are to pray in such a way that we are praying in faith. We pray because we expect God to answer. We pray because we want to see His will done. Therefore, when we come to the Word of God it is great just to feast our hearts on the truth of these great promises which establish the very confidence that we have as we come to the throne of grace.

III. PRAYER MUST BE ACCORDING TO THE WILL OF GOD.

But now, the third thing that I want to mention is that prayer must be according to the will of God. We must pray. We must pray believing that God answers prayer and will answer our prayers, but we must pray in accordance with the will of God.

If you want to look at these two verses in 1 John chapter five, verses fourteen and fifteen, you will find these words:

And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing

according to his will, he heareth us: And if we know that he hear us,

whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him.

When the Lord was speaking of prayer in the verses we read just a few moments ago in John chapter 14, 15, and 16, instead of saying that we must pray according to the will of God, He expressed it in slightly different words. He said, "If you abide in me, and my words abide in you," or "if you ask anything of the Father in my name, he will do it." All of these verses mean that if we are to be effective in our praying, then it is very, very important for us to know the will of God. And if we are to know the will of God, then we must know the Word of God because the only place that God has seen fit to reveal His will is in His Word. Prayer is not just a way for me or for you to get something that we want from God. We do not pray together because we feel that the more people we get to pray, the more we can overwhelm God at the Throne of Grace and convince Him to do something that He may be reluctant to give to us. This is not prayer at all. Prayer is praying

according to the will of God; and prayer is the divinely appointed means for us to seek and obtain that which is according to His will. I believe, and I am sure that the Scriptures teach, that there is special power in united prayer. This is the reason we let needs be known: so that we can be praying together about these things. Our prayers, as strange as it may seem, are a vital part of what God is doing and what He is accomplishing in the world according to His eternal will and purpose. Thus, there is no conflict between the sovereignty of God, on the one hand, and the importance of our prayers, on the other.

There are many times, of course, when we do not know what the will of God is. For example, if I get sick, there is nothing in the Scripture that says that I have the right to claim healing, and that I am going to get well. That is entirely in the hands of God. And this is why, in matters like this, we need to pray that the Lord's will might be done. It all fits into His eternal purpose and His eternal plan. But remember that James said, "Ye have not because ye ask not, or ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts" (James 4:2-3). So God has ordained that we should pray. God has ordained that our prayers should be answered. God has ordained that our prayers should be according to His will. And in being according to His will they are a vital part in accomplishing His will in the world as it relates to the smallest details of our lives.

This morning our Scripture reading was in 2 Samuel chapter 7. I want you to turn back to that passage again because here is an illustration of the very thing that I want to emphasize with you this morning. I trust that it will be a real encouragement to you as you think about your own relationship to God in prayer.

David wanted to build a house for the Lord. You can see the account of that in the first seventeen verses of 2 Samuel 7. If we had a little more time, I would like to read all of that passage because that prepares the way for the prayer which begins in the eighteenth verse and goes to the end of the chapter. Let me briefly summarize it for you. David wanted to build a house for the Lord. The question was: Was it the will of God for David to build it, or wasn't it the will of God? David thought it was; and Nathan the Prophet, you can see from the third verse of the chapter, also thought it was probably according to the will of God for David to do this. Then one night the Word of God came to Nathan. Nathan was supposed to go tell David that he was not to build a house for the Lord, that his son would eventually build that house, as Solomon did. You can find the record of that in the chapters that follow. Instead of David building an house for the Lord, the Lord said, "I am going to build an house for you." They were using the word "house" in different ways. What David meant was, "I want to build a Temple for the Lord." He was concerned that he was living in a house of cedar and that the ark of the covenant was still in a tent. So he

wanted to do for the Lord what he had done for himself. It was certainly a worthy project for David to set his heart on. That was the kind of house that David wanted to build for the Lord. But when the Lord said, "No, I am going to build a house for you," He was talking about a family. He was talking about what He was going to do with David, and David's son, and David's son's son, and right on down the line. You remember that the Lord Jesus Christ, Who eventually came in fulfillment of all of these Old Testament promises regarding salvation, came as the greatest Son of David--a part of David's house, the chief descendant of David. The Lord promised that this line was never going to be destroyed. In this prayer we find David dealing with that promise in

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prayer. I want you to see, in the time that we have this morning, just exactly how his heart was drawn out to the Lord, and the different kinds of prayer that he exercised in recognizing what God was going to do. I want you to see what David really did with that promise.

Men who study the Scriptures have thought to divide the prayers of the Bible in different ways. I just read this past week that A. W. Pink divided prayers into humiliation, where the child of God will confess his sins and humble himself before the Lord; then supplication, when he comes and brings his requests to God; and the third kind that Mr. Pink recognized was adoration. He coupled in this both thanksgiving and worship. Those are good divisions. Others see four or five different kinds of prayers.

David was moved to pray by the word that God gave him through the prophet Nathan. That is what I want you to note. This would teach us, if we are reading our Bibles the way we should, that our reading of the Word of God should move us to pray. It is said of Cotton Mather that he spent approximately seven hours on every sermon that he preached, but that his preparation was to take a portion of Scripture, and then to pray over it. He would pray over the first verse, and then pray over the second verse, until he had prayed over his whole text. So his seven hours, approximately, that he spent in preparing a message were seven hours of prayer, seven hours of devotion to God and to the Lord Jesus Christ. It is no wonder that he was so marvelously used in his ministry. David had received a word from God just as you and I would pick up our Bibles and read a portion of Scripture. David's prayer was prompted by Scripture.

The first thing that he did in this prayer was to humble himself before the Lord. This is an amazing promise that God has given to David. Look at verses 18 and 19 again:

Who am I, O Lord God? and what is my house (my family), that thou hast

brought me hitherto? And this was yet a small thing in thy sight, O Lord

God; but thou hast spoken also of thy servant's house for a great while

to come. And is this the manner of man, O Lord God?

You see, when the Word of God came to David, David was humbled in his heart. He is not the only one who has said in effect, "Who am I?" But you see when God made this tremendous promise, a promise which eventually was going to result in salvation in the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, David looked back upon his family and he said, "Who am I that you brought me this far, and who am I that you have given me such a promise regarding my family for a great while to come? Surely this is not the way that man would deal with a situation like this." God was giving David something that was far beyond David's greatest expectation, and David was humbled at hearing the Word of God.

You see, when the Word of God comes to us by the power and blessing of the Spirit of God, we are going to be humbled. There are going to be many, many times when you and I are going to say, though we do not have the place that David had, "Who are we that Jesus Christ should die for us? Who are we that we should be conformed to the image of God's Son? Who are we that we should be the heirs of all of these wonderful promises and these great doctrines that God has given us in the Word?" If anything should humble us before God, it ought to be the knowledge of the doctrines of the grace of God. Who are we that we should be chosen before the foundation of the world? Who are we that the Gospel should come to us, and that

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God in His sovereign power should draw us to Himself? Who are we that we should be the recipient of all of these blessings?

Next, in David's prayer, notice his submission, in verses 20 and 21:

And what can David say more unto thee? for thou, Lord God, knowest thy

servant. For thy word's sake, and according to thine own heart, hast thou

done all these great things, to make thy servant know them.

You will look in vain if you try to find some expression on David's part that he was worthy of what God was going to do for him in establishing his house forever. Instead, he said it was "for thy word's sake, and according to thine own heart." You know, when we talk about the doctrine of election we are always inclined to feel that there just has to be some reason why God has chosen some for salvation, and why He has

not chosen others. And yet, when you come to the Word of God, you find that there is no more merit in His chosen ones than there is in those whom He has not chosen. The choice is not made upon the basis of what you and I are in the sight of God; the choice is made according to God's own heart and for His own Word's sake. If you look into your heart, or you look into my heart, to find the reason for God's choice, you are going to look in vain.

Let us go on. Notice his adoration in verses 22-24:

Wherefore thou art great, O Lord God: for there is none like thee, neither is there any God beside thee, according to all that we have heard

with our ears. And what one nation in the earth is like thy people, even

like Israel, whom God went to redeem for a people to himself, and to make

him a name, and to do for you great things and terrible, for thy land,

before thy people, which thou redeemedst to thee from Egypt, from the

nations and their gods? For thou hast confirmed to thyself thy people

Israel to be a people unto thee for ever: and thou, Lord, art become their God.

Not only was he humbled, and not only was he submissive to what God wanted to do, but his heart was lifted up in adoration and praise to God.

Then I want you to note specifically, beginning with verse 25, how he used this word that God has given to him. Notice this carefully.

And now, O Lord God, the word that thou hast spoken concerning thy servant,

and concerning his house, establish it for ever, and do as thou hast said.

Do you see what David was doing? God had said, "I am going to establish your house. I am going to establish it forever." What David is doing here is that he was turning this promise into a prayer. You say, "Well, if God promised to do this, why does David have to pray about it?" My only answer to that is that this is simply the way that God was dealing with His servant, and David was claiming His promise; therefore, David's prayer becomes a part of what God has promised to do. The promises of God are the foundation of our prayers, and we do not have any right to expect God to do anything that He has not promised to do. So here David was turning the Word of God back to the Lord in prayer. Note verses 26, 27:

And let thy name be magnified for ever, saying, The Lord of hosts is the

God over Israel: and let the house of thy servant David be

established before thee. For Thou, O Lord of hosts, God of Israel, hast revealed to thy servant, saying, I will build thee an house: therefore hath thy servant found in his heart to pray this prayer unto thee. David was saying, "I would never have even thought of such a thing if you had not made this promise to me. But because you made the promise, therefore I have found

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in my heart to pray this prayer." And so he concluded, And now, O Lord God, thou art that God, and thy words be true, and thou hast promised this goodness unto thy servant: therefore now let it please thee to bless the house of thy servant, that it may continue for ever before thee: for thou, O Lord God, hast spoken it: and with thy blessing let the house of thy servant be blessed for ever (2 Sam. 2:26-29). The way David prayed was really just an amen to the promise of God. "Lord, this is what you promised; you promised to bless my house; you promised to establish it forever; and consequently you placed in my heart a desire to pray for this very thing. I am praying, Lord, that you will do exactly what you have promised to do; and that you will bless my house that it may continue for ever before thee."

I wish I had the time this morning to cite some other illustrations. Let me just take one. Will you turn to Psalm 119? I want you to see this; I want you to see how the Word of God was used in prayer and that the promises of God were turned back to the Lord in supplication. Let me give you four verses from Psalm 119. They are grouped here together. There may be others along this same line in this Psalm, but let me just give you these as I close.

Verse 38: "Stablish thy word unto thy servant, who is devoted to thy fear." You see, the Psalmist is praying that God would keep His Word.

Verse 41: "Let thy mercies come also unto me, O Lord, even thy salvation, according to thy word." The mercies were the promises of God, the blessings that He had committed Himself to give to His people; the Psalmist prayed that they would come according to the Lord's Word.

Verse 49: "Remember the word unto thy servant, upon which thou hast caused me to hope."

Finally, in verse 58: "I intreated thy favour with my whole heart: be merciful unto me according to thy word."

So we pray because we are commanded to pray. We pray expecting that God is going to answer our prayers when we pray according to His will. But we pray also with the conviction that our prayers are a vital part of what God is doing in accomplishing His will in our generation. In David's prayer he took his proper place before God, didn't he? He worshiped God for His glorious plan and then he prayed that God would do what He had declared to do.

This is our privilege. Our prayers are a part of that plan. Our prayers are a vital part of it. God has revealed in His Word what that plan is. He is working all things out in accordance with His will. Therefore, when we pray we are to pray that that purpose might be accomplished, that His elect people will be drawn to Himself, and that they will be kept by His marvelous power. We turn the promises of God into prayer, expecting that God is going to answer in accordance with His predetermined will, and for His own glory.