

Text: Exodus 32:11-14

Title: "Intercessory prayer"

Time: 1/28/2024 am

Place: NBBC

Introduction: Mark 9 records some embarrassing episodes for the disciples of Jesus. In that chapter their pride causes them to be highly critical of servants of God who were casting out demons but not following with them (v. 38). Earlier, as Jesus tried to explain to them that He would have to suffer at the hands of men and be killed, the disciples were too busy arguing who would be the greatest in the kingdom to pay much attention (vv. 30-37).

And perhaps the saddest episode of the chapter happened when a grieving father brought his demon-possessed son to be healed, only to find out that the disciples were powerless to do so. Their impotence was a reflection on their Lord, for the father said to Christ, "Master, I have brought unto Thee my son . . . and I spake to thy disciples that they should cast him out; and they could not" (vv. 17-18).

In the next verse, Jesus explains what was wrong and how to make it right again. He simply tells those He describes as a faithless generation to "Bring him to Me." As I read this passage Thursday morning, I was struck by the truth that obeying this directive is what intercessory prayer is all about. After the boy was healed, Jesus explained to His disciples, "This kind can come forth by nothing, but by prayer" (v. 29). It is by interceding for others that we bring them to Christ.

In our passage Moses intercedes for the nation of Israel, who had committed a great sin. He bows low and brings the nation to their God for healing, forgiveness, and deliverance from the demonic influences that had deceived God's people. The intercessory prayer we read in our text is one of the great

prayers of intercession we have in our Bibles. This prayer was answered in the affirmative. The nation was spared (32:14).

Not all great prayers of intercession result in this same outcome. From Genesis 18 we learn of the intercessions of Abraham for Sodom, the home of his nephew Lot. God answered that if He found ten righteous in the city, He would not destroy it. The prayer failed to save the city because the ten righteous could not be found. Evidently, there comes a time when intercessory prayer is no longer able to save.

At the end of Israel's history, when their many great sins had ripened to judgement, the Lord had decided, "Though Moses and Samuel stood before me, yet my mind could not be toward this people: cast them out of my sight, and let them go forth" (Jer. 15:1). Samuel was a great intercessor who committed himself to pray for the disobedient King Saul. Those prayers too were unable to save the king from his just due.

As we turn the page to our New Testaments, intercessory prayer is our calling as well. The Apostle Paul instructs Timothy, "I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; For kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour; Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim. 2:1-4). We set aside 1 Timothy 2 prayer times to focus on "kings and all who are in authority," but also Paul mentions intercessions "for all men."

We never know whether it is too late, but we do always know that it is our calling to obey Jesus's command through intercessory prayer. He says to us, "Bring them to Me." So we are called to do what Moses does in this passage, and I would like us to learn from his intercessions for Israel three things this morning about our own need to intercede in prayer for others.

I. Intercessory prayer asks questions (vv. 11-12a).

Application: Moses's intercession begins with two questions. The first question is "Why does your wrath burn?"

Illustration: Another intercession was made for King Jeroboam, who after leading the rebellion of the ten northern tribes against the throne of David, set up calves very similar to the idol of the great sin of our chapter. He did so to keep the northern Israelites from traveling south to the temple, where they might renew their allegiance to Jerusalem.

God calls a man of God to the scene of Jeroboam's great sin, and he prophesied against the king's idolatry. When he does so, the king stretches out his hand demanding the prophet be arrested. After doing so, the arm became paralyzed, and he was not able to bring it back to his body again. Under those conditions, Jeroboam asks the man of God to do something to the face of his God: "Intreat now the face of the Lord thy God, and pray for me" (1 Kings 13:6). He uses the same phrase about the face of God that we have here, describing what Moses does in prayer (v. 11).

The idiom translated *intreat the face* in 1 Kings and *besought* here means *to become weak* in its basic form (the *qal* theme). The form of the verb used in these passages is causative (*piel*), so our text tells us literally that by praying Moses caused the face of God to weaken, or to be appeased.

Strong fury is something that can be seen in the face of the angry one. God's face featured this fury against Israel's sin. The answer to Moses's question, "Why does your wrath burn?" is very simple - God is holy, and He hates sin with a holy wrath. Like the surface of the sun, this is His nature.

And yet, intercessory prayer asks a second question: "Why should the Egyptians say that you led your people out of

bondage only to destroy them?" In other words, Moses's second question tells the Lord that He would get greater glory if He could save this sinful people from the just judgment of His holy wrath. Thankfully, the Lord agrees, and so in this way His face of fury is made less strong. His wrath is appeased. Because of Moses's intercessions, God's wrath is propitiated. The doctrine of propitiation tells us what happens to God's wrath against our sin when we have an effective intercessor.

Illustration: The propitiation of God's wrath is like the calming of the storm of the winds and the waves, which we read about in Mark 4:37-41, "And there arose a great storm of wind, and the waves beat into the ship, so that it was now full. And he was in the hinder part of the ship, asleep on a pillow: and they awake him, and say unto him, Master, carest thou not that we perish? And he arose, and rebuked the wind, and said unto the sea, Peace, be still. And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm. And he said unto them, Why are ye so fearful? how is it that ye have no faith? And they feared exceedingly, and said one to another, What manner of man is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?"

And so, the answer to the question, "Why does Your wrath burn?" is that God is holy and justly angry against sin. And the answer to the question, "Why should the Egyptians say?" is that Someone has said to the holy nature of the Father, "Peace be still." The wrathful judgment we deserved was poured out on Christ in our place at the cross. The propitiation of God's wrath against sin was the basis for Moses's prayers for Israel, and it makes possible our prayers for God's mercy today. Even the winds and the waves of God's wrath obey the One who says, "Bring them to Me."

II. Intercessory prayer makes requests (vv. 12b-13).

Application: The first request Moses makes is that the Lord turn and repent (v. 12b). When we think of the need to repent,

we often think of the need of sinners to repent of their sins. Moses is not asking the Lord to repent of His sins. He is asking the Lord very literally to turn from His necessity to judge sin and to comfort Himself in spite of His wrath against sin. We have already seen how the Lord accomplished both of these things through Christ.

1 John 2:1-2, "My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world." And so in this sense, the Lord graciously turns and repents. He propitiates His wrath through His Son.

An important reason He did so relates to Moses's second request, "Remember" (v. 13). What Moses asked the Lord to remember was a promise that He made to the patriarchs, the Abrahamic covenant. He describes this oath to the forefathers as one that the Lord swore "by thine own self."

Illustration: When we make a promise in a court of law or upon entering office, we swear by the Lord with the words, "So help me God." When we do that, we are confessing that God will hold us accountable to keep our promise.

It works differently for the Lord's promises. He swears Himself in, and He holds Himself accountable. This is what Moses refers to when He asks the Lord to remember that He swore by Himself. Not only is it intrinsic to God's holy nature that He hates sin, but also that, because God is holy, He cannot lie. He must keep His promise.

Now technically, it would seem that had the Lord destroyed Moses's fellow-Israelites and raised up a new nation through Moses (v. 10), the promised to the patriarchs would have still been fulfilled, because Moses was one of their offspring.

But when Moses asks the Lord to remember His promise, he is not referring to technicalities. He is referring to God's amazing grace. He wants the Lord to remember the promise to the patriarchs and the amazing grace that accompanied the promise. God's promised plan for Israel's blessing was never in response to the godliness of the patriarchs, but rather an act of God's grace on the patriarchs, in spite of their sin.

The flaws of Abraham, Issac, and Jacob are well documented in Genesis and elsewhere. And now God was dealing with their equally flawed descendants. Moses says to the Lord, "Remember how gracious your promise is." And when we bring sinful people to the Lord in intercessory prayer, we do so calling on God's matchless grace and mercy for sinners.

Heb. 4:14-16 tells us of this grace and its promise when we pray for others: "Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession. For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need." The one who says, "Bring them to me" also says "Come boldly. I have grace and mercy. This is My promise, and I cannot lie."

III. Intercessory prayer has a result (v. 14).

Application: The nation of Israel was saved by intercessory prayer. In today's political parlance, we might say that Moses "Made Israel Great Again." He did not do it by political power or leadership savvy. He did it through the power of intercessory prayer. If our sinful nation is going to survive her great sins, so that our grandchildren know the free and prosperous land that was a gospel blessing to the world in our day, it must be in answer to intercessory prayer.

One day, the whole world will be filled with nations that are free and prosperous and gospel blessings to one another. When that happens, it too will be the result of intercessory prayer, that of our Lord Jesus Christ for us. Moses' prayer for Israel resulted in Israel's survival. The prayers of our Apostle and High Priest (Heb. 2:1), Jesus Christ, results in our obtaining eternal life. Hear how He intercedes for you and for me:

"Father, the hour is come; glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee: As thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him. And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent. I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do. And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was" (John 17:1-5).

Conclusion: In Mark 4, Jesus asked His disciples two questions after rebuking the winds and calming the seas: "Why are ye so fearful? How is it that ye have no faith?" It was perhaps in answer to these questions, which we all must answer honestly before the Lord, that the great Methodist hymnist Charles Wesley penned the words to "Arise, My Soul, Arise":

"Arise my soul arise. Shake off thy guilty fears.
The bleeding sacrifice in my behalf appears.
Before the throne my surety stands,
Before the throne my surety stands,
My name is written on His hands.

"He ever lives above, for me to intercede.
His all redeeming love, His blood availed for me.
His blood availed for all our race,
His blood availed for all our race,
And sprinkles now the throne of grace.

"Five bleeding wounds He bears, received at Calvary.
They pour effectual prayers; they strongly plead for me.
Forgive him, O forgive, they cry.

Forgive him, O forgive, they cry.
Nor let that ransomed sinner die.

“The Father hears Him pray, His dear Anointed One.
He cannot turn away the pleadings of His Son.
The Spirit answers to the blood.
The Spirit answers to the blood,
And tells me I am born of God.

“My God is reconciled. His pardoning voice I hear.
He owns me for His child. I can no longer fear.
With confidence I now draw nigh.
With confidence I now draw nigh,
And Father, Abba Father, cry.”

And so, laying aside fear and unbelief, drawing nigh like Moses and Wesley, may we faithfully pray intercessions for sinners in need of forgiveness, confident that our Savior intercedes for us. Perhaps our first prayer of intercession must be a plea for our own forgiveness. Does the Spirit answer to the blood and tell you that you are born of God? Do you hear the pardoning voice of the One who intercedes for you?

“A man came—I think it was actually in Philadelphia—on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, ‘Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.’ That is the distinction—the sermon, and the ‘lightning and the thunder.’ To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters.”

—David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

Preachers and Preaching