

Precious Prayer

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[0:00] Well, we're studying the precious things of God, and we just did the next precious thing.! We just did the next precious thing. Precious prayer. Prayer.

And we're going to take the same tact that Winslow has taken before. Prayer is precious because of what it is and then because of what it does.

So let's consider prayer being precious, first of all, because of what it is. Prayer is me talking to a listening God. And that emphasizes both ends of prayer.

Indeed, both aspects, if there is to be any communication at any level, there has to be these two sides. Me talking, God listening.

So let's look at both ends briefly this morning. First, on the praying end. Here on earth is me talking to God.

[1:05] By the way, it's a God I have never seen. It's a God I cannot see. But whom we believe in. And we believe He is real.

So right away, we see that prayer is an act of faith. Indeed, Hebrews 11, 6 says, Without faith, it is impossible to please God.

Because anyone who comes to Him. That's the language of prayer. Prayer is coming to Him. And anyone who comes to Him must believe two things. First, that He exists.

You don't see Him, but you must believe that He is. And secondly, that He is the rewarder of those who diligently seek Him. Amen. So prayer only happens when by faith we believe that God is real and that He is listening and answering our prayers.

Hebrews 11 begins by saying, Faith is being certain of what we do not see. And that is never more true than when we pray.

[2:12] We are certain that God exists. And that we are not just talking into the air. We're not just talking to ourselves. We're not talking to one another who may be listening and praying along with us.

But that we are talking to a real person. The living God. And that He is listening as we speak and will answer us. Without that, we're just saying our prayers, but not really praying.

And so Dr. Martin Lloyd-Jones said, Prayer in many ways is the supreme expression of our faith. Faith expresses itself in many ways in Hebrews 11 and in our lives.

But Lloyd-Jones says, One of the supreme expressions of faith is when we talk to God. Precious faith in action expressing itself in precious prayer.

But is it really possible to talk to God? I think again we're seeing with many of these precious things that we've grown so accustomed to these ideas that we may take them for granted and no longer be staggered at its precious privilege.

[3:25] So let's just think for a moment of a world without prayer. Think of your life without prayer. If there was no such thing as prayer, how much would you miss it?

Well, for the world, life would go on without a hiccup. But for the believer, life could not go on. Because for the believer, prayer is the Christian's vital breath.

He could no more live without prayer than he could live without breath. So prayer, then, is the other half of communion with God.

We saw in the last couple weeks the preciousness of the Word of God. That's God talking to us. And now, here's the other half of the conversation.

It's us talking to Him. An audience with the King of Kings. A child speaking with their Heavenly Father. As Billy Bray used to say, I've got to go talk with Father about this.

[4 : 34] That's prayer. It's having a little talk with Jesus. Like those disciples of John the Baptist when he was beheaded in prison. And the Bible says that they went and told Jesus.

They were brokenhearted. They went and told Jesus. Now, they told Him face to face. We know less than they. Go and tell Jesus.

And we go through this precious avenue called prayer. So the first half of prayer is me talking to God. And the other half of prayer is that unseen, there in heaven, God is listening.

I'm talking and God listening. He's on the receiving end of my prayer. And without this, whatever it is, it's not prayer.

It's only self-talk. It's a man talking on the phone when nobody's on the other end of the line. There's no communication. For all the words being spoken, there is no prayer.

[5 : 42] But the wonder of prayer is that when I pray, someone is on the other end of the line. And he is, as we say, all ears to hear what we have to say.

Whenever you call on His name, you never get an answering machine. You never get a computer talking to you with canned, pre-programmed responses.

You don't get a secretary shielding Him from all but the real important people calling. No, you always get the living God Himself personally listening to you.

Turn to 1 Peter chapter 3, a verse that Peter quotes from the Old Testament.

1 Peter 3 and verse 12 that surely shows us one of the elements of precious prayer. He talks about the eyes and ears of God.

[6 : 45] Of course, we know that this is anthropomorphic talk, but it expresses a glorious reality that we need to be convinced of afresh.

1 Peter 3, 12, quoting from Psalm 34, Peter says, For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and His ears are attentive to their prayer.

That word is a precious word, attentive. Attentive. It's something we want when we're talking to someone, don't we?

This is something wives want when talking to their husbands. They want an attentive husband. Eye contact. Knowing that if she's got his eyes, she's got a better chance of really getting his ears.

She's after attention. But if he goes on watching the game on television or texting with the phone, they may be hearing some sounds, but you sense that they are barely listening.

[7 : 55] That's not being attentive. That's not what God does when we pray. A positive example of this, I'm dating myself. I don't know that E.F. Hutton is even in the business anymore, but I remember the old E.F. Hutton commercials.

And there in a public place, you would have two men speaking to one another, and one fellow would say to the other, Well, my broker is E.F. Hutton. And he says, and then suddenly everyone in the vicinity stops what they're doing, cranes their neck, and leans in with their ear to not miss a word of what E.F. Hutton has to say about the market.

That's attention. And the phrase was, when E.F. Hutton speaks, people listen. Well, child of God, when you talk, God listens.

And in spite of all that's going on around him, there in heaven, with the angels never stopping to praise him, holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, the spirits of just men made perfect who have died and gone to be with him, praising him, a whole world to look after and feed and take care of, all that's going on around the throne.

Nevertheless, when the child of God prays on earth, we have his full attention.

[9 : 23] He cranes his neck. The Bible says he turned his ear to me. Psalm 116.2. Just like a mother who will turn her ear to get down close to a sick child to hear what they're whispering out in their sickness.

Such is the attentiveness of Jehovah to his people's prayers. He doesn't want to miss anything. Now, I'd never believe this unless the Bible said it, that when a nobody like me speaks, none other than the Almighty God listens with that kind of rapt attention.

I mean, shoot, there's times when we have trouble, and perhaps, you know, have trouble getting our kids to pay attention, or our spouse to pay attention, or our class to pay attention.

But when we pray, God pays attention. Precious prayer. Well, Peter is quoting here from Psalm 34 and verse 15, and that psalm is a beautiful psalm where David is extolling the Lord for hearing his prayer.

He says in verse 6, This poor man called, and the Lord heard him and saved him out of all of his troubles. Verse 17, The righteous cry out, and the Lord hears them and delivers them out of all their troubles.

[10 : 46] So this is prayer. Me talking, that's the first half of it, but talking to a listening God. And that's borne out even in the way David addresses God.

There's a precious title that he gives to God in Psalm 65 and verse 2. He's addressing God, and he says to him, O you who hear prayer.

O you who hear prayer. What a fitting title for God. You who hear prayer. Who's he talking about?

We know who he's talking about. God knows who he's talking about. He's known by this title because it describes him. What kind of a God do we have? Well, his title declares, We have a God who hears prayer.

And the effect of it is given in the last part of the verse. O you who hear prayer, to you all men will come. Of course they will because here's one who hears them when they call.

[11 : 52] And so people from all over the world, Gentiles, pagans, who used to have gods of stones with ears that could not hear, they will come to you who hears prayer.

And the Bible often does this sort of thing. It makes us aware of the preciousness of our privilege of prayer by contrasting it with all the other gods of the world and the other nations of the world.

So in Deuteronomy 4 and verse 7 when Moses would impress upon the people of God their great privilege of prayer, what does he say? He says, What other nation is so great as to have their gods near them the way the Lord our God is near us whenever we pray?

We are unique in this privilege of prayer of all the nations that when we pray we have a God who is near and who is listening and who hears.

And the contrast is found throughout scriptures. Isaiah 16, 12 when Moab appears at her high place, her shrine, her place where she prays, she only wears herself out.

[13 : 06] And when she goes to her shrine to pray it is to no avail. Oh, she does a lot of talking. There are many words and other things but she's only wearing herself out because there's no one listening.

And so it's to no avail. You remember the prayer contest on Mount Carmel where the whole issue was who is the real God?

Is it Baal or is it Yahweh, the God of Israel? And at the direction of the living God Elijah says let's have a contest.

And each side was given a bull to arrange on the wood but no one was to set fire to it. Rather, as he says to the prophets of Baal, you call on the name of your God, I'll call on the name of the Lord.

And the God who answers by fire, he is God. The God who answers prayer, he's the real living true God. So they called on the name of Baal from morning till noon.

[14:19] Oh, Baal answer us. You see what they're after? A prayer answering God. Answer us, they shouted. And then the telling commentary. But there was no response.

No one answered. And they danced around the altar they had made. And at noon, Elijah began to taunt them. Shout louder, he said. Surely he is a God. Perhaps he's deep in thought or busy or traveling.

Maybe he's sleeping and must be awakened. And so they shouted louder and slashed themselves with swords and spears as was their custom until their blood flowed.

Midday passed and they continued their frantic prophesying until the time for the evening sacrifice. But there was no response. No one answered. No one paid attention.

The repetition is important. What is God's word telling us? That when the nations pray, they don't have a God who's near them like our God is near us and who hears and answers.

[15:25] No one pays attention even though they're feverishly seeking attention by cutting themselves and making themselves bleed. Baal worshipers are only wearing themselves out at prayer.

Well, then it's Elijah's turn. He prepares the altar, douses it with water three times and prayed once. That's it. Oh, Lord, God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, let it be known today that you are God in Israel and that I am your servant and have done all these things at your command.

Answer me. That was the prayer of the Baal prophets. Now it's the cry and prayer of Elijah. Answer me, oh Lord. Answer me so these people will know that you, oh Lord, are God and that you are turning their hearts back again.

And then the fire of the Lord fell and burned up the sacrifice, the wood, the stones, the soil, and also licked up the water in the trench. And when all the people saw this, they fell prostrate and cried, the Lord, he is God.

He is God. You see, he is the God who hears and answers his children's prayer. And that is as much the precious privilege of any child of God as it was of Elijah.

[16:45] That's what James is wanting us to know in James chapter 5. Elijah was a man of like passions as we are and yet he prayed and God did amazing things. And the prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.

Whoever you are. Because the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their prayers. And so the privilege is held before us as we compare our God to the gods of the nation.

I think of the Muslims and rising early in the morning to that screeching call to prayer. and washing themselves and dressing and going to the place of prayer and prostrating their faces to the ground and saying their chants and their prayers to their Allah five times a day.

But there is no response. No one answered. No one paid attention. The Buddhist pinning his little prayer requests on a piece of paper to the prayer wheel and spinning it thinking that for every rotation it has a better chance of getting through.

And so he's spinning feverishly. Why? He's wanting God to pay attention to his prayers. No response. No one answered.

[18:10] For no one's paying attention. The Christless Jews wailing at the wailing wall. Putting their little prayers into the cracks of the wall seeking God for an answer.

And no one responds. No one answers. No one pays attention. What other nation is so great as to have their gods near them the way the Lord our God is near to us whenever we pray to him?

Does that not make prayer precious? When through faith in Christ we call on God's name in prayer he hears and answers. You see our Lord has already done everything necessary to get God's attention.

The Baal prophets are slashing themselves. Jesus shed his blood to open up a way whereby God will pay attention to our prayers. A new and living way through his blood has been opened up.

prayer is drawing near to God through Jesus Christ. And so James says draw near to God and he will draw near to you.

[19:23] There's both sides you see of the communion and of prayer here. It's as if God is saying you draw near to talk to me and I will draw near to listen to you.

Wonderful reality that makes prayer precious just because of what it is. Me talking and God listening. But it's also precious in the second major heading because of what it does.

And who that's been a Christian for any length of time at all but can say I love you Lord because you heard my cry and therefore I will call on you as long as I live.

Because we have a journal if not on paper at least in our hearts and minds. I was in trouble I called and he answered me. And so prayer is precious because of what it does.

Winslow says prayer is the mother of a thousand blessings. Now we don't have time to look at the thousand this morning. We're only going to just mention a few of the blessings of what prayer does.

[20:30] And the first thing I want us to think of is that it's through prayer that we are saved. It's through praying that we are saved. Not as if our prayers earn merit and thereby make us right with God.

But prayer is the means by which we hold up the empty hands and receive Jesus Christ and his full salvation. For whosoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.

That's prayer. Calling on the name of the Lord. What a precious thing is prayer. Two men went up into the temple to pray. Jesus tells the story. One was the low down tax collector the unreligious the irreligious and the other was that proud religious Pharisee.

And they both said their prayers to God. And the Pharisee prayed about himself and all the things he hadn't done and did do that God ought to be impressed with him and then the public and the tax collector just smote his breast and could not even lift his eyes to heaven to talk to God but just said God be merciful to me a sinner.

And Jesus says that man not the other went home right with God. It was a prayer. It was just a cry God mercy me the sinner.

[21:51] Salvation justification forever right with God. So is prayer not precious because it is the means by which we receive Christ and his salvation all his saving blessings in him.

Jonathan Edwards says now this is all the further the hypocrite prays. His only concern was to be saved from hell. And so thanking himself saved from hell he's done praying.

He has no further business with God. No further need for God. He has all he wanted from God and so he leaves off praying. Wonderful sermon searching sermon hypocrites deficient in private prayer.

But how different for the true child of God. He finds more reasons to pray after conversion than less. He wants God himself not just his gift of eternal life.

He's been given a new heart that loves God and wants to know him better. A heart that wants fellowship with him. That wants to talk with him and that is upset with any distance between him and his savior and anything that comes and clouds that communion.

[23 : 06] he he's he's the one who says as for me it is good to be near to God and he draws near in prayer. Let the worlding have their treasures and pleasures.

It's good for me to be near God. My feet almost slipped because I was envying them but now I've come to see the real blessing. The real precious privilege is me. I get to be near to God.

I come near in prayer. Precious prayer. And so the second thing prayer does is maintain it's the way by which we maintain this personal communion with God.

Sweet fellowship with our very best friend our heavenly father our indwelling spirit. But furthermore the true convert sees after conversion it's not like well my business is done with God he sees how poor and needy he is he sees himself as unable to do anything without the Lord constant need of further help and so he finds himself continuing to come back to the throne of grace and what does he find when he comes this is the third thing that prayer does it brings grace and draws strength from God for he finds at the throne of grace mercy and grace to help him in his time of need!

Hebrews 4.16 grace that enabling power to do God's will so he's weak and he knows it and he comes to God and he finds strength to obey strength to persevere strength not to quit in the midst of his trial strength to be patient and to be loving with unlovable people God says to his people in Psalm 105 look to the Lord and his strength seek his face always what's he saying he's saying pray to God for strength because that's how you are strong in the Lord and in his mighty power how does God's power come to the saint by prayer we look to the Lord we seek his strength and he gives it an answer to our prayers it's those who wait upon the Lord in prayer that he renews their strength makes them sore like the eagles run and not grow weary and walk and not be faint Spurgeon says it is yet to be seen how much power

[25 : 27] God can put into a man just let that tease you the next time you go to prayer and you feel your weakness God make me as strong as a redeemed sinner can be on this earth to resist temptation to love you and to love others give me that strength so what can prayer do what are its possibilities well prayer can do what God can do because prayer engages God and brings him onto the battlefield so that we have in prayer a weapon with divine power to pull down strong holds what can prayer do well prayer stopped the sun it expelled demons it healed the sick it raised the dead and stopped the rain for three and a half years and then turned it on again it opened the hearts of sinners it opened the doors of prisons it closed the mouths of lions it gave boldness and witness

Winslow says assuredly there is nothing more potent than prayer yea there is nothing comparable to it he is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine so prayer is precious because there we find strength we find grace to help us in our time of need prayer is God's appointed way for us to receive blessing from him ask if you want to receive seek if you want to find knock if you want the door open because he who asks does receive and he who seeks does find and he who knocks the door will be opened you see it prayer is the way that we receive these blessings!

from God it brings every blessing from above forth it brings the full ministry of the Holy Spirit in our lives remember Jesus words after teaching them to pray the disciples heard him pray said Lord teach us to pray he teaches them to pray and then he gives them illustrations of prayer and then he gives us an encouragement of prayer and he says man if you being evil know how to give good gifts!

to your children how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him disciples ask the Father for the Spirit more of the Spirit's work in your lives he gives the Spirit to those who ask precious prayer that brings the full ministry of the Spirit open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your law that's the Spirit's ministry to teach me comes through prayer five prayer what can prayer do it brings wisdom to know and to live to know God's way and to live God's way in the midst of our confusion of life if you've ever been in trials where you don't know what to do like our sister Rose now needing to decide whether to take cancer treatments or not what do I do and we don't know the next step what does

James tell us if any man lacks wisdom he should do what he should pray he should ask God who gives generously and it will be given to him without chiding him it will be given him liberally prayer is precious because it brings wisdom not just the knowledge of what to do but the ability to put that knowledge to good use in our lives and to actually walk in wisdom's way and then sixth prayer is precious because it is the means whereby we see other people saved it almost staggers us we understand God has chosen those who are to be saved and yet we have statements in our Bibles like this from the apostle Paul who taught more about predestination than any other author of scripture in Romans 10 1 my heart's desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved he prayed for their salvation and did

[29 : 54] God answer his prayers just read a quarter of your New Testament and you'll see over and over how God abundantly answered that prayer for their salvation precious means whereby God works out his sovereign will and then seventh what can prayer do well it's God's way for us to unburden our hearts prayer can unburden our hearts of a guilty conscience where do you go when you have a heart that's heavy with sin and guilt and you know you've messed up and you've sinned against God and there's that burden failure regret well we find mercy at the throne of grace and that's why we come and why we pray 1 John 1 9 if we confess and you do that in prayer don't you if we confess our sins he's faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness and so we pray we confess our sins in prayer we don't confess our sins to a priest we confess our sins to God and he hears and he answers and he washes our conscience clean in the blood of

Christ which cleanses from every sin so it's God's way to unburden our hearts from a guilty conscience for sin but it's also God's way to unburden our hearts of the pressures and trials and cares and worries of life counselors are under great demand in our day we watched a program on heroin addicts and how they're just dialing their phones like maniacs trying to find counsel they know that they're hooked they know they need out and there's nobody listening sad sad program you know a lot of people are just wanting someone to listen to them just letting them unburden and just to share their woe and isn't that a lot of counseling listening being a good listener and hearing what's going on so that even sometimes people leave and say what a wonderful counselor you were and all you did was listen that's tapping into a great need of people under pressure you see we were never made never meant to live under the pressures and trials and tribulations of life without a

God to talk to in prayer we weren't made for this it's a burden a load that will crush us and so what does Jesus do he says come to me all you who are weary and heavy burdened and I will give you rest and that's not just for a lost person to do once and then to have no more business with Jesus it's for us to do whenever we feel a burden of any kind on our back Jesus is offering the invitation to come and unburden ourselves before him we come in prayer and he's always ready to listen he's waiting he's inviting pour out your hearts to me you people at all times cast all your cares upon him for he cares for you how do you cast your cares on Jesus it's a it's you know what fishing is you cast you throw out a line we're being told to throw our cares onto him we do that by praying we're saying

Lord I'm heavy here will you take this and you tell him what's burdening you and you and you just give it over to him and then you do what the fisherman does and you bring it back onto your back and so you go again you just go on casting as often as you feel the burden you go and unload casting it upon him because he cares for you and so he's attentive to you and so we're to worry about nothing but to pray about everything that's God's way of bringing peace and relieving the burden prayer it's God's standing invitation to tell out all our woes to him who loves us most what a friend we have in Jesus all our sins and griefs to bear what a privilege to carry everything to God in prayer precious prayer and we've spent most of our time just talking about how precious it is because of what it is and what it does for us and how it's precious to us and we just touched upon seven things we could go on and on but you know the greater part of

Winslow's chapter and his treatment of prayer and why it's so precious is to point out how precious it is to God that's a whole other vein that makes prayer precious to us when we see how precious our prayers are to him Proverbs 15:8 the Lord detests the sacrifice of the wicked but the prayer of the upright pleases him King James is his delight it's precious to him he delights in the prayers of his people so when we draw near to him he's not saying oh no not him again he's saying yes I get to hear from my friend again that's what he calls his people his friends and he delights in our prayers yes my poor words my stammering praise my prayers of such little faith my urgent cries for help my prayers of repentance that have so much that need to be repented of a heart that is often cold divided and scattered and yet when I come and cry just as

[36:10] I am my prayers rise to heaven through Jesus Christ as a sweet smelling aroma Revelation 5:8 is the text that Winslow uses for this chapter on precious prayer it takes us into heaven by way of a vision and we see the lamb at the center of the throne and when he had taken the scroll that is when the lamb had taken the scroll the four living creatures and the 24 elders fell down before the lamb each one had a harp and they were holding golden bowls full of incense which are the prayers of the saints and Winslow says the whole vision is designed to present the fact that the church of God is a praying church and that the prayers of the Lord's people ascend before him as precious incense holy fragrant and acceptable through the infinite atoning merits of Jesus Christ so our prayers are spoken as incense to God

David says in Psalm 141 let my prayer come before you as incense a sweet smelling aroma as an evening sacrifice so the neighbor's barbecuing and you're out in the yard and it is a sweet aroma that's what the prayers of the saints are to God it's like the smoke is taking them right on up into heaven and he said what a pleasing aroma is this my people are praying that's the picture given to us so all true prayer Winslow says but a desire a groan a tear a sigh is precious to God because it is at one and the same time both inspired by the Holy Spirit within and presented by the Lord Jesus our high priest in heaven so it comes from God is offered through

God the Son to God the Father and it is sweet to him because it comes from his spirit through his son and is presented before him it is this truth that stamps a value upon the weakest prayer the saints of God ever breathed our high priest presents the merits of his blood and makes our prayers accepted at the throne of grace Winslow says we are many times dejected at the remembrance of our prayers oh but the concern that Christ has in them is a ground to raise us we have an advocate who knows how to separate the impertinences and follies which fall from the mouths of his clients he knows how to rectify and purify our bills of request and present them otherwise than we do how happy a thing it is to have one to offer up our prayers in his golden censer and to perfume our weak performances by applying his merits to them oh

Satan distracts our prayers but cannot blemish Christ's intercession he is more quick to present our groans than we are to utter them so prayer is precious because of what it is us talking and God listening it's precious because of what it does it brings every blessing from above and it's precious because it's precious to God a sweet smelling aroma and if there was no other reason I think Winslow is hitting it right on the head if there's no other reason we ought to take delight in prayer you know he calls his church a house of prayer because he delights when we gather and we lift up our voice to him in prayer so today there will be many prayers offered in this place as we gather together and let's think of them how are they being received on the receiving end well they're being received a sweet smelling it is pleasant pleasing precious to him because they arise it rises from his people's hearts moved by the

Holy Spirit presented through the merits of his son and he's more eager to hear our prayers than we are to pray let that draw us increasingly to the throne of grace brothers and sisters let's pray even now shall we our God how could we ever know how you received our prayers what you thought of them if you had not told us and we see just how much we need a savior need a mediator to present our prayers and make them acceptable before you we see what a father's heart you have that you delight in the prayers of your people and please hit us again with the shocking reality that when we pray you listen and meet us every time we pray with this precious faith oh strengthen our faith to see a

[41:30] God who exists and who hears and answers and rewards the diligent prayers made in Jesus name oh give us that encouragement in our hearts to pray and give us more than anything else that sweet fellowship with yourself in prayer we might come away glad that we've been with Jesus and we've unloaded our burdens and we've found such a friend and such a strength and such love as we find nowhere else thank you for being our prayer hearing and answering God and we pray in Jesus name amen