

GREAT PRAYERS TO A GREAT GOD

An outline study by

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Text: “O thou that hearest prayer unto thee shall all flesh come!” (Ps 65:2, KJV)

That is one of the most seminal statements about prayer in the entire Bible. It shows –

(A) A GREAT DEMONSTRATION

(1) The psalmist recognises that prayer is universal – “*all flesh*” will hasten toward the God who answers prayer! We learn that

(a) PRAYER IS A UNIVERSAL INSTINCT

- anthropologists affirm the universality of prayer, in every culture and as far back as the dawn of history.
- but then we make an astonishing discovery –

(b) PRAYER IS A UNIVERSAL FAILURE

- see *Psalm 115:4-8*
- yet, astonishingly, people keep on praying!
- for example, consider the following prayer, offered in an Assyrian temple some 3000 years ago –

My Lord is wrath in his heart: may he be appeased again.

May God be appeased again, for I knew not that I had sinned.

May Ishtar, my mother, be appeased again, for I knew not that I had sinned. ⁽¹⁾

God knoweth that I knew not: may he be appeased.

Ishtar, my mother, knoweth that I knew not: may she be appeased.

(1) Cp. *Psalm 41:4; 51:1-2*.

May the heart of my God be appeased . . .
 The transgressions (I committed my God) knew.
 . . . (*the next few lines are obliterated*) . . .
 The transgression (I committed, Ishtar, my mother,
 knew).
 (My tears) I drink like the waters of the sea.
 That which was forbidden by my God, I ate without
 knowing;
 That which was forbidden by Ishtar, my mother, I
 trampled on without knowing.
 O my Lord, my transgression is great, many are my
 sins . . .
 O my God, who knowest that I knew not, my
 transgression is great . . .
 My Lord, in the anger of his heart, has punished me.
 God, in the strength of his heart, has taken me . . . ⁽²⁾
 I prayed, and none takes my hand.
 I wept, and none held my palm.
 I cry aloud, but there is none that will hear me.
 I am in darkness and hiding, I dare not look up.
 To God I refer my distress, I utter my prayer . . . ⁽³⁾
 Mankind is deaf, and none knoweth it.
 Mankind, whatsoever be their name, what do they
 know?
 Whether he shall be afflicted, or whether he shall be
 prosperous, there is no man that knoweth.
 O my God, overthrow not thy servant.
 In the waters of the raging flood take his hand.
 The sin that he has sinned turn into good.
 Let the wind carry away the transgression that I
 have committed.
 Destroy my manifold wickedness like a garment.
 O my God, seven times seven are my
 transgressions,
 My transgressions are ever before me.

At the end of the prayer, a rubric is attached, which says: "For the tearful supplications of the heart, let the glorious name of every god be invoked 65 times, and then the heart shall have peace." ⁽⁴⁾

(2) Cp. *Psalm 6:1; 38:1-4; 88:16-17.*

(3) Cp. *Psalm 18:41; 22:2; 69:20; 85:1 ff.*; etc.

(4) Adapted and shortened from A. H. Sayce, *Assyria, Its Princes And People*; The Religious Tract Society, London; 1926; pg. 88-91. Note that the Assyrians had some 400 gods; thus (if the rubric is to be taken literally) the penitent had to repeat the names of the gods some 26,000 times! But remember that those ancient people had no easy way of counting (our number system was not invented until the Middle Ages). How could they be sure that every name had

- (2) So the Psalmist declares that the greatest gift God's people can give to the world is a demonstration of answered prayer –
 - see *Psalm 115:1-2*; and our text.
- (3) If our churches are not packed, perhaps it is because people think that our God is as helpless as any pagan deity!

(B) A GREAT EXPECTATION

(1) A great demonstration can be built only upon a great expectation.

(2) Let your expectations rise up to meet these promises of answered prayer, from the New Testament alone – *Matthew 17:20-21; 18:19-20; 21:21-22; John 15:7,16; 16:23-24; Romans 8:32; Ephesians 3:20*

- but especially see *1 Timothy 2:2*, which is perhaps the most incredible statement about prayer spoken anywhere in scripture; it promises power to move great nations!

(C) A GREAT INVITATION

(1) Some may think that only great saints, apostles, leaders, can pray great prayers and get great answers from God

- the Psalmist plainly did not think so; he saw that God was inviting “all flesh” to his throne.

(2) Note that prayer is the one universal right, given by God to all people in every nation

- see *Hebrews 10:19-22a*. Never allow anyone to rob you of the absolutely unfettered access to the throne of God that is freely yours in Christ.

CONCLUSION

There is a story told about Alexander the Great. He rewarded one of his generals by giving him an open order on the royal treasury. But when the general presented the order and demanded a huge sum of money, the treasurer, dismayed by the size of the demand, refused to pay it. When Alexander heard about it, he was furious – with his treasurer. With burning indignation he rebuked the clerk: “*Do you not realise that my general magnifies the greatness of my kingdom by the greatness of his demand? Give him what he demands!*”

I often have the feeling that the Father is patiently waiting for me to do just that – magnify the greatness of his kingdom by the greatness of my demands!

It is sadly true – if the only measure people had of our God was the measure given him in our prayers, they would reckon him small indeed. They would never imagine he is the Lord of the

been repeated the correct number of times? Thus, if a spell or prayer did not work, the priest could easily accuse the worshipper of counting incorrectly.

whole earth, the possessor of the cattle on a thousand hills, and of the wealth in every mine (Ps 50:10-12)!

If a stranger heard you praying, how big would he reckon your God to be? Remember, his only measure is your prayer. Would he reckon that God is wealthy and mighty, or helpless and impoverished?

Let us rather, based on God great invitation to us in Christ, and filled with great expectations, provide the world with a great demonstration of answered prayer!