

LIFE CHANGING PRAYER – PART 2

The Aroma of Prayer

Matthew 21:13 (ESV) ¹³ He [meaning Jesus] said to them, “It is written, ‘My house shall be called a house of prayer, . . .’”

As we conclude our prayer study, I want to remind you of Jim Cymbala’s observation that the most wonderful place to visit outside of heaven is the throne room of grace! The way we reach this destination is through our prayers. During Old Testament times, each evening the Jewish priest would offer a burnt offering in the temple on the brazen altar and also burn a sweet smelling substance on the golden altar. The purpose of this incense offering was to honor God. Incense symbolized and expressed the prayers of the Hebrew people, which pictured a pleasing aroma being offered to God. Let’s read what David wrote concerning his prayers.

Read Psalm 141:2 (ESV) ² *Let my prayer be counted as incense before you, and the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice!*

Even in Old Testament times David was a man with spiritual insight who understood that he could pray and worship God even if he was away from the temple and had no priest to assist him. God accepted David’s prayer and uplifted hands. David’s hands were empty but his heart was full of love for the Lord and faith in His promises. True prayer is fragrant to God.

In ancient times tears were sometimes collected in bottles. Tear-bottles were used when a man was in great distress. His friends would visit him, and as he wept they would gather his tears and put them in a bottle, preserving them as sacred memorials of the event. Let’s read what David had to say about the collection of our tears.

Read Psalm 56:8 (ESV) ⁸ *You have kept count of my tossings; put my tears in your bottle. Are they not in your book?*

God’s Word reveals through David the precious truth that God takes note of all our sorrows and He remembers them. The imagery of God saving our tears in a bottle shows us how deeply God loves us. People love to collect mementos from those they love and places they have been. We could say that God is a Collector too. He collects and saves not only our tears but our prayers as well.

In Revelation there are two mentions of the sweet smelling collection found in heaven – that is the prayers of the saints. The scene in **Revelation 5** is John’s vision of heaven’s throne room where the Lamb who is Worthy takes the scroll of God’s judgment into His own hand.

Read Revelation 5:8-10 (ESV) ⁸ *And when he had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each holding a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints.* ⁹ *And they sang a new song, saying, “Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and*

people and nation,¹⁰ and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth.”

Although opinions vary, I believe it is most likely the four living creatures are angelic beings and the 24 elders represent the people of God in heaven. They are each pictured as holding golden bowls of incense described as being filled with the prayers of the saints and the fragrance of those prayers permeate the throne room of grace. Keep in mind that saints are those who have been separated from the world and consecrated to the worship and service of God. Followers of the Lord are referred to as saints throughout the Bible.

I will paraphrase J.R. Miller, a Christian author born in 1840. He wrote of how God creates a beautiful word picture. God receives the prayers of the saints – every sigh, every yearning, every intercession of love, —and saves them all in golden bowls, that none may be lost! Often our prayers may seem to remain long unanswered—but we may be sure that they are not lost or forgotten. While humble believers in this world are engaged in offering up prayers and supplications, holy fragrances are wafted up before God. The picture seems designed to show us the heaven-side of earth's true worship.

Prayers Become a Holy Aroma

Read Revelation 8:3-4 (ESV)³ *And another angel came and stood at the altar with a golden censer, and he was given much incense to offer with the prayers of all the saints on the golden altar before the throne,⁴ and the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, rose before God from the hand of the angel.*

Notice this time, we are told that the incense mingles with the prayers of the saints. I agree with Matthew Henry who says, “The prayers of the saints themselves stand in need of the incense and intercession of Christ to make them acceptable and effectual.” ***Romans 8:34 (ESV)***³⁴ *Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.*

The Bible nowhere encourages, or even mentions, believers asking individuals in heaven for their prayers. Scripture does say in ***1 Timothy 2:5 (ESV)***⁵ *For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.* We pray to the Father through the Son, for He alone is worthy. For centuries, God’s people have been praying the words, *Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done!* This picture in Revelation shows that those prayers will be answered.

One of the things we love about the holidays are the aromas. We equate Thanksgiving with the smell of roasting turkey and pumpkin pies. The smells associated with the secular side of Christmas include: fresh pine needles, cinnamon and bayberry candles to name a few. The guys at the Maximum Security Unit tell us that for them the smell of Christmas has become Irish Spring soap when large quantities are brought for distribution throughout the prison.

We all know that those pleasant earthly smells do not last. It is more important to create pleasant aromas that God can breathe in and enjoy. In the Old Testament for the earthly realm, God listed the ingredients to be used in the temple incense. ***Exodus 30:34-35 (ESV)***³⁴ *The LORD said to Moses, “Take sweet spices, stacte, and onycha, and galbanum, sweet spices with pure frankincense (of each shall there be an equal part),³⁵ and make an incense blended as by the perfumer, seasoned with salt, pure and holy.*

J Vernon McGee explains concerning these spices, “These were blended with pure frankincense. It was a secret formula, long since lost. The mixture of these spices gave off a sweet incense, and it was not to be duplicated nor replaced.”

As we think of a secret scent formula that has long been lost, let’s make sure that we never lose the correct ingredients in our prayer life needed to make our prayers smell sweet as they rise to the throne room of grace.

Salvation

Read Romans 10:9-10 (ESV) ⁹ *because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.* ¹⁰ *For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.*

The Lord Jesus gave His life’s blood so that the curse of sin and death will be removed from each individual who prays this prayer! When we have received His free gift of Salvation, let give Him our

Adoration!

Read Revelation 4:11 (ESV) ¹¹ *“Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created.”*

Sharing something that smells ‘sweet’ is a blessing to both the giver and the receiver. When we adore God in our prayers it will be a sweet aroma to Him and return to us as a blessing.

Confession

Read 1 John 1:9 (ESV) ⁹ *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*

Even after we accept Christ, we do not move into a state of perfection. We still possess a sin nature. When we do things that are wrong, others may not even notice but God knows our hearts. He sees how we are quick to judge, or neglect the things of God, or prone to quench the Spirit. God knows what we do. It is glorious that God’s Word promises that when we confess our sins we are cleansed.

Thanksgiving

Read 1 Chronicles 16:34 (ESV) ³⁴ *Oh give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; for his steadfast love endures forever!*

We studied last week how giving thanks to our Lord is a wonderful way to bring a pleasing aroma to God. It is always good to be reminded to be thankful most especially for God’s great salvation.

There are countless ways to add pleasant aromas to our prayers. But praying for others is a special fragrance to God.

Read Ephesians 6:18 (ESV) ¹⁸ *praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints,*

The Aroma of Christ

Read 2 Corinthians 2:15 (ESV) ¹⁵ *For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing,*

Just think! We can be the Aroma of Christ to those around us. The Life Application Bible comments on this verse by saying that, “In a Roman triumphal procession, the Roman general would display his treasures and captives amidst a cloud of incense burned for the gods. To the victors, the aroma was sweet; to the captives in the parade, it was the smell of slavery and death. When Christians preach the Good News, it is good news to some and repulsive news to others. Believers recognize the life-giving fragrance of the message. To nonbelievers, however, it smells foul, like death—their own.” In all that we say and do, whether in our own home or before the world, it should be our goal in life to be the aroma of Christ to others.

Some people have ‘signature scents.’ My Aunt Vita was one such person. In her younger days it was the scent of Tabu and in her later years it was Rose perfume. If she came to the house and petted the cat was left with her scent. Depending on whether or not you liked the smell of Rose perfume or Tabu determined your response to the scent. We need to focus on making sure that our aroma pleases God. There are multiple things that we are told that are sweet-smelling to God in the spiritual realm.

The smoke of Noah’s sacrifice after the flood is called a pleasing aroma to the LORD. This pleasing aroma caused God to make some promises. You can read about them in **Genesis 8:21**. It is recorded that the Levitical burnt offering of a ram on the altar was *a pleasing aroma, a food offering to the LORD*. **Exodus 29:18**

Never forget that what we do for others pleases our Father. Paul said in **Philippians 4:18 (ESV)** ¹⁸ *I have received full payment, and more. I am well supplied, having received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent, a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God.*

The most significant aroma ever
is found in *Christ’s offering of Himself*

Ephesians 5:2 (ESV) ² *And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.*

I will leave you with a thought from J.R. Miller: The Old Testament incense offering did not give forth its perfume - until it was burning, and the only fire allowed to be used in kindling it was holy fire from the altar of burnt-offering. This pictures how cold words do not make prayer. There can be no incense-prayer without fire - the fire of love; and the fire must be kindled in the heart by coals from the altar of Calvary, by the love of God shed abroad by the Holy Spirit! There will be no sweet savor in our prayers, no acceptableness before God, unless they are cleansed by the merits of Christ’s atonement. We can approach God only in the precious name of Jesus Christ, and in dependence on His sacrifice for us. Let’s truly pray and keep God’s fire burning!