

Before we begin our study, it is important for me to restate that my thinking continues to be influenced by a number of authors who have written on the book of Revelation:

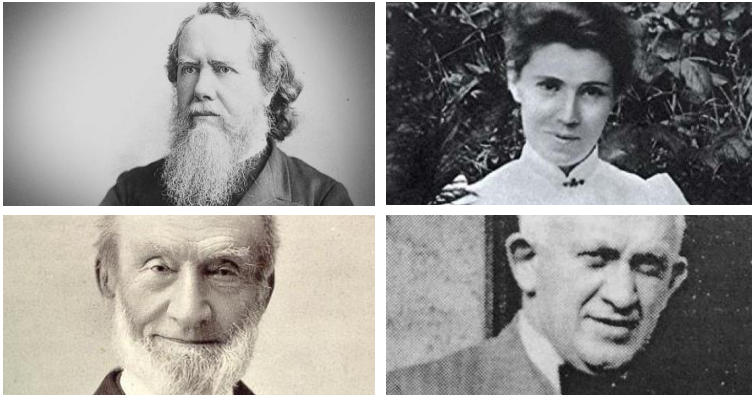


Gerhard Krodel, Darrell Johnson, Eugene Peterson, Tom Wright

I think for all of us there are a handful of themes in the Bible that we often think about. Is prayer one of them for you? It is for me.

My mind and my heart resonate with the stories of individuals who learned to pray... with great persistence and effectiveness.

Hudson Taylor, Amy Carmichael, George Mueller, Rees Howell



Remember a core theme of Revelation? That is the title of this teaching series ...

**Things are not as they seem!**

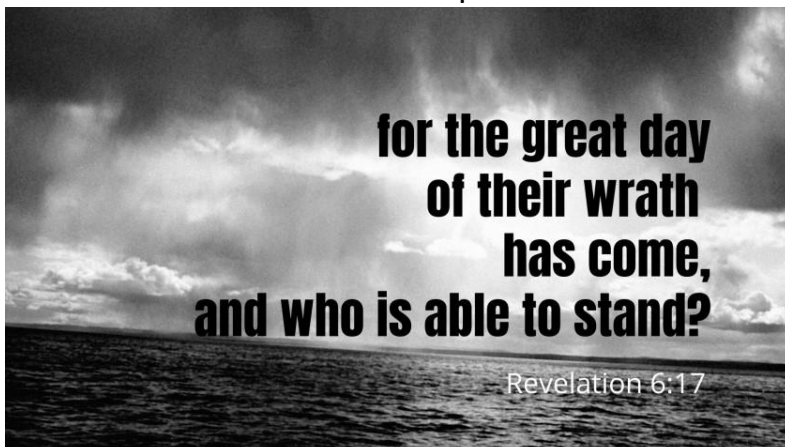


This is particularly true of prayer.

Today's passage encourages us to pray...confident of this – God listens.



Revelation 6 describes the opening of the first six seals.  
Before the seventh seal was opened ...



...a statement... **“the great day of their wrath has come...”** ... was made by those not in relationship with God and who were desperate to hide from him...  
...and then a question was asked by these same people – **“who is able to stand?”**

Revelation 7 provides heaven’s answer to their question.

Our passage for today says that when the Lamb opened the seventh seal there was silence in heaven for about half an hour.

Darryl Johnson says... **the silence is explained by the context of the passage.** p.177

In Revelation 7:9-12, we read of the exuberant praise in heaven.

And then something remarkable happens in chapter 8 – there is silence for half an hour... and then peals and rumblings of thunder is heard, flashes of lightning are seen and an earthquake is felt upon the earth.

The context helps us to understand this vision.

John, who was the human author of Revelation, also wrote a gospel that bears his name.

In John's gospel there are multiple instances of Jesus speaking about "**his hour.**" At first in the gospel, it is stated four different times that his hour had not yet come.

John 2:4 – My hour has not yet come.  
John 7:6 – My time has not yet come...  
John 7:30 – ... his hour had not yet come.  
John 8:20 – ... his hour had not yet come.

And then four different times it is stated that Jesus' hour had come.

John 12:23 – The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.  
John 12:27 – ...for this purpose I have come to this hour.  
John 13:1 – ...Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father...  
John 17:1 – Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you.

Jesus' hour was not speaking of a literal 60 minutes, but of a divine moment that had been... fore-planned... before the creation of the world.

That divine moment was the sacrifice of Jesus' life for the sin of the world of humanity.

The book of Revelation describes the details leading up to another divine moment... – the return of King Jesus to the earth and the launch of a new age defined by righteousness, rather than sin and death.

What Revelation 8 reveals to the reader is that this final hour... is comprised of, that is, it involves a half hour of silence followed by divine action.

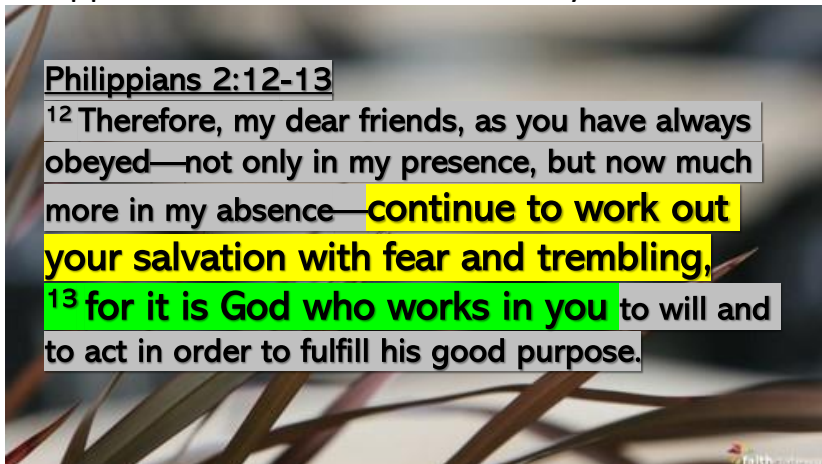
I need to emphasize this because it is important that we be clear on this, otherwise we risk misrepresenting and diminishing God.

God is always the initiator.

But the Father has so determined; that is, he has chosen to receive the prayers of his people.

He receives them, in that he listens to them and incorporates our prayers into his action here on the earth and in the unseen realm.

I confess that... here... we stand before a great marvel.  
Philippians 2:12-13 is but one of many remarkable examples.



We work out our salvation.

God works in us.

Both statements are true.

Because of his kindness, his faithfulness, his majesty...God includes his children in his work of rescue.

As the hour draws ever close, our passage impresses upon us that the prayers of God's people do matter – that they do contribute – that they are part of God's will being done here on the earth as it is in heaven.

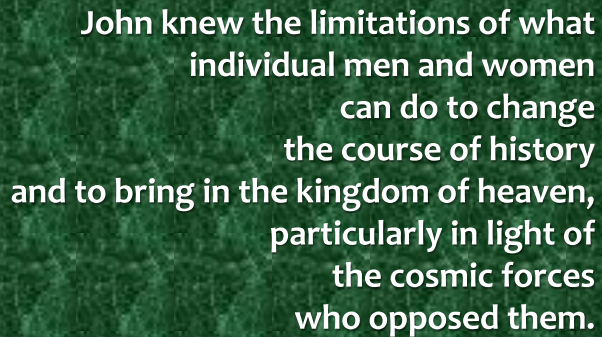
We pray ...and God listens.

We pray ...and are prayers are included and contribute to the culmination of history.

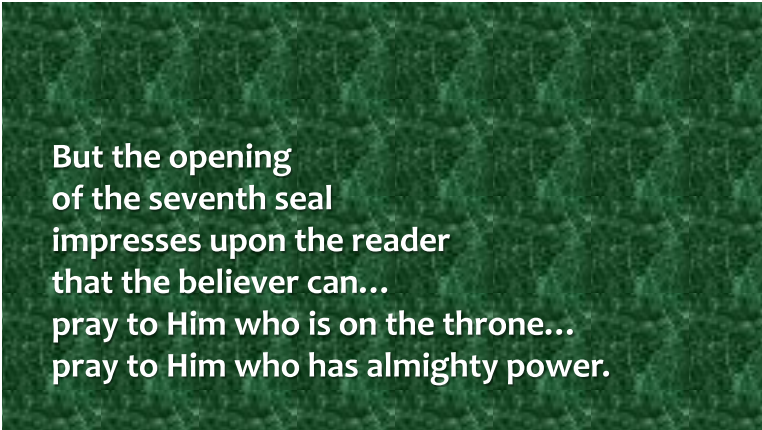
Let's now connect this teaching to our lives.

G. Beasley-Murray says:

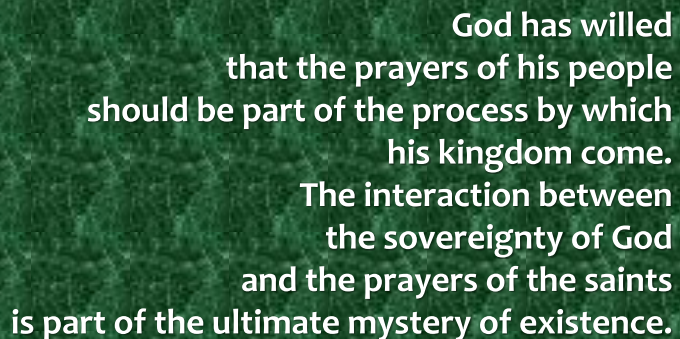
**"The significance of this picture can hardly be overestimated...."**



John knew the limitations of what individual men and women can do to change the course of history and to bring in the kingdom of heaven, particularly in light of the cosmic forces who opposed them.



But the opening of the seventh seal impresses upon the reader that the believer can... pray to Him who is on the throne... pray to Him who has almighty power.



God has willed that the prayers of his people should be part of the process by which his kingdom come. The interaction between the sovereignty of God and the prayers of the saints is part of the ultimate mystery of existence.

**Faith is called on to live in the tension between the two."** The Book of Revelation, p.151.

There are three things to consider.

- Prayer impacts God

I need to qualify again – that the Father has determined to receive our prayers and to welcome us into a glorious partnership with him.  
In this regard he permits our prayers to touch his heart.

Look again at v.3.

What is the purpose of the altar which John saw before the throne of God?

To answer that question we need to ask a simpler question – what is the purpose of an altar?

An altar is a place where sacrifice is made.

But what is sacrificed on this altar in heaven?

Look again at v.4.



Prayer is an act of worship – where... as we pray, we give to God our time, our attention, our energies to speak with and to listen to him.

And God... listens to us... as a Father.

He also receives our prayers as a sacrifice presented to him because of our love for him; because of our gratitude for his gift of salvation and his day-to-day graces that sustain our lives.

Our prayers come up before God and are received by him as a beautiful gift.

In the beginning when humanity's first parents were created, they were welcomed into the fellowship of the Father, Son and Spirit – it was a fellowship of rich conversation and belonging – as evidenced by the practice of God who would walk with Adam and Eve in the cool of the evening.

This fellowship which God had with Adam and Eve was not a fellowship of duty, but of delight.

Born of the Spirit the follower of Jesus is welcomed back into this fellowship.

It can be challenging for us to believe this... but God delights in those who come to him through faith in Jesus.

**The Lord your God is with you,  
the Mighty Warrior who saves.  
He takes great delight in you;  
in his love he will no longer rebuke  
you, but will rejoice over you with  
singing.**

**Zephaniah 3:17**

Many parents save the cards and notes given to them by their children. Some put them in a special box.

The scene in Revelation 8 – is not saying that the prayers of God's people lay there on the altar, like we put a special card or note on the mantle or the fridge or some other special place in our homes.

The prayers of God's people come up before God, they touch his heart and when mixed with the fire of God's Spirit become part of what God does on the earth.



- Prayer impacts God
- Prayer impacts the church

I need to remind you of where John was and what he was doing when this vision was shown to him.

We must remember the desperate circumstances in which the church of that day lived.

The might of the Roman empire stood in opposition to the believers of that day. There was great pressure upon them to capitulate... to deny Jesus and bow the knee and swear allegiance to Rome and its gods and goddesses.

When compared to Rome the resources of the church were as nothing.

John himself was in exile.

**Revelation 1:9**

**I, John, your brother and companion in the suffering and kingdom and patient endurance that are ours in Jesus, was on the island of Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.**

Listen to how Peter addressed his readers in his first letter.

**Revelation 1:9**

I, John, your brother and companion in the suffering and kingdom and patient endurance that are ours in Jesus, was on the island of Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.

**1 Peter 1:1**

To God's elect, exiles scattered throughout the provinces of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia...

Exile was one of the means of punishment Rome used in that day. In the case of John, the authorities deliberately isolated him from the Christian community with the hope that loneliness would break him.

But John knew... he was not alone in his suffering – what he was facing, the church as a whole was facing in varying degrees. Peter endeavored to remind his readers of the same thing.

But there was something else that enabled the believers of that day to patiently endure in the face of great opposition. Look again at **Revelation 1:9-10**:

I was **on** the island of Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. On the Lord's Day I was **in** the Spirit...

Revelation 1:9-10

John was **on** the island of Patmos. But on the Lord's day he was **in** the Spirit, that is, he communed with God. We must not miss the significance of this.

**“Praying is that act in the life of faith of coming into awareness, of practicing an attentiveness which consciously and deliberately enters into a speaking/listening conversation with God...”**

**Eugene Peterson**

p.89

I'm certain there were many distractions for John on Patmos. But John chose to pray... and to listen... and to wait on the Lord. In this manner, prayer impacted John's life, as it did with the church of that day.

When the church of Jesus prays... we enter into the presence of God who holds all things together; who is at the center of all reality and existence. This is when all things are put in right perspective for us... because it is then we perceive God as he truly is.

It is when the church prays that the Spirit reminds us...

- There is no demon...no political or military power... greater than the triune God.
- There is no circumstance outside of God's control.
- God's wise, gracious and sovereign ability is what enables him to take things intended for harm and turn them to bring about the saving of many lives

It is this ongoing conversation with God that enables the followers of Jesus to live by faith and not by sight; to courageously stand their ground because they are convinced that things are not as they seem – that God indeed does reign!

- Prayer impacts God
- Prayer impacts the church
- Prayer impacts the world

Tom Wright says....

**“The story of the Bible is that...**

**God is committed  
to working in this world  
through human beings.**

**Prayer, even the anguished prayer of those who do not fully understand what is going on, is a vital element in this mysterious cooperation.” p.79.**

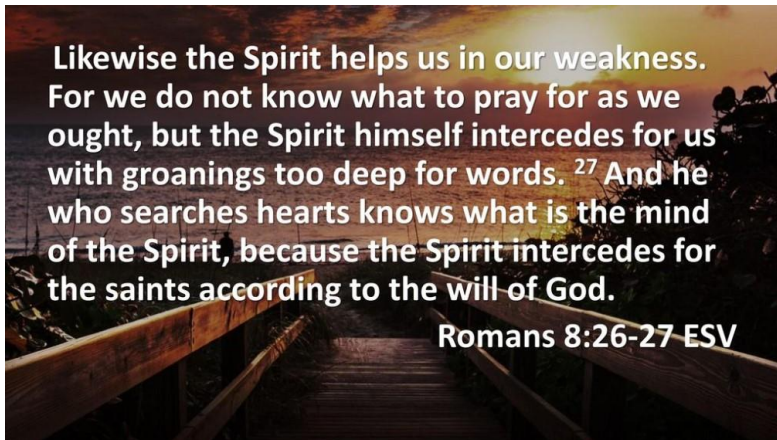
Jacques Ellul writes:

**The Christian who prays acts  
more effectively and more  
decisively on society than the  
person who is politically involved.**

Jacques Ellul

Prayer and the Modern Man, p.167.

This is why the Spirit of God prays alongside of us.



- helping us in our weakness
- praying for us when we don't know what to pray
- taking our prayers and mingling them with his own to ensure we pray according to the will of God

Does not this practice of the Spirit...reinforce the understanding that God has committed himself to work in the world with... and alongside of... and through his people?

Look again at v.5.

The angel filled the censor with fire and hurled it on the earth.

What is happening here?

When the seventh seal is opened... and there is silence...when the prayers of the saints are presented to God...when fire from the altar is taken and hurled to the earth... it caused things to happen on the earth... peals of thunder; rumblings; flashes of lightning; an earthquake... that are part of the return of the King.

The same thing happened... when the seventh trumpet sounded... and when the seventh bowl was poured out.



Revelation 11:19

And there came flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, and earthquake and a severe hailstorm.

Revelation 16:18

Then there came flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, and a severe earthquake.

We learn from Revelation 8 that the prayers of God's people impact the earth because they influence God.

Eugene Peterson says:

**“The prayers of God’s people which ascend to him, return with immense force... Prayer re-enters history with incalculable effects. Our earth is shaken daily by it.”**

Eugene Peterson

p.88.

Peterson continues saying, “God gathers our cries and our praises, our petitions and intercessions, and he uses them. Our prayers that go up before God now descend on the earth. God uses our prayers in his work.” Peterson, p.95

In the midst of incredible visions of what is and what will be, the believer is reminded here in Revelation 8 ...of the importance, the priority and the power of prayer.

Prayer impacts God.

Prayer impacts the follower of Jesus.

Prayer impacts the earth.