

SERMON SERIES: "Teach Us to Pray"
SERMON TITLE: "We Pray for God's Holy Will on Earth as It Is in Heaven"
SERMON TEXT: 2 Chronicles 6:12-14, 18-21; 7:12-18
PREACHER: Rev. Kim James
OCCASION: September 8, 2019, at First UMC

INTRODUCTION

If you were in worship last Sunday, you know that our emphasis all this month is going to be on prayer. We began this "Teach Us to Pray" series on September 1st with The Lord's Prayer, as found in the Gospel of Luke, and we talked about a number of different ways we can pray, times when we can pray, and what we might expect to result from our prayers. Since the children are also learning about The Lord's Prayer in Sunday School, I thought it might be good for us to stay close to those same themes. While the kids will learn by using a variety of methods like storytelling, games, cooking, crafts, and science—I thought we older ones might approach prayer, in general, and The Lord's Prayer, specifically, by looking at a variety of scripture texts. So, today, we're going to use 2 Chronicles 6 and 7 to help us meditate on how we might pray for God's holy will to come on earth as it is in heaven.

1—PRAYER POSTURES AND POSITIONS

This story of King Solomon's prayer and God's response begins by teaching some prayer postures and positions we might use in our conversations with God. To make this more interactive, I've asked some people to come up to the front of the sanctuary and help demonstrate these prayer postures for us. And I'm going to ask Tim Stenner to read again for us 2 Chronicles 6:12-14. While Tim is reading, the volunteers and I will act out the prayer postures and positions.

Then Solomon stood before the altar of the Lord in the presence of the whole assembly of Israel, and spread out his hands. Solomon had made a bronze platform five cubits long, five cubits wide, and three cubits high, and had set it in the court; and he stood on it. Then he knelt on his knees in the presence of the whole assembly of Israel, and spread out his hands toward heaven. He said, "O Lord, God of Israel, there is no God like you, in heaven or on earth, keeping covenant in steadfast love with your servants who walk before you with all their heart."

These verses suggest to us that there are many ways we can use our body in prayer. While it's certainly OK and wonderful to pray alone in your prayer closet at home while sitting very still in a chair with your eyes closed and your hands folded, some of us just fall asleep when we become that quiet. For those of us who are wiggly, extroverted, or needing more stimulation to keep us on task, it's nice to hear that we can also pray in a noisier public place by moving our body around. King Solomon's prayer indicates the very good news that our prayers can be spoken while standing among the people at church, while spreading out our hands, while building something, while climbing up, while kneeling, while directing our hands and our attention to heaven, or while walking before God with all our heart.

Maybe you pray in some of these ways. I personally like to pray while walking. As pastor of the church, I'm fortunate to have access to this lovely worship space all week long. So I make a practice of praying while walking laps around the sanctuary—which is a nice climate controlled space throughout the various seasons of the year. Maybe some of you say your prayers while walking through your neighborhood, hiking up a mountain trail, or while working out on a treadmill at the gym. Of course, Solomon wasn't only *walking* with the Lord. He also *lifted his hands up* to the Lord in heaven, which suggests that we could possibly also say our prayers while lifting weights up over our shoulders.

I like that the writer of Chronicles included that Solomon had made the bronze platform. Actually, he most likely ordered someone else to build it. But, even so, that shows that we can pray while doing our work—whether that's managing employees, shaping bronze or wood in the shop, cooking food in the kitchen, growing plants in the garden, putting our children to bed, or even keeping up with the endless emails on our computers. Really there's no place and no way that we can't pray. For those whose bodies don't move very easily anymore, it's a great benefit that we can pray while lying flat on our beds or stretched out in our recliner. But, for others of us, it's good to know that—when we pray, we don't have to be as immobile as a Buddha statue or as stationary as a praying mantis bug. We can communicate with God using all kinds of prayer postures and positions.

2—MEDITATE ON THE HOLINESS AND DIVINITY OF GOD

Another lesson in this 2 Chronicles story is that prayer is a way for us to meditate on the holiness and divinity of God. In the first line of The Lord's Prayer, we acknowledge that God is our father in heaven, and we ask that God's name be hallowed or made holy. Solomon's prayer began in a very similar way, when he said, "O Lord, God of Israel, there is no God like you, in heaven or on earth." Solomon was acknowledging that the God of Israel was the supreme being of the universe.

Psalm 82, which we read in our Call to Worship, affirms that God is the ultimate holy one. Written and gathered together during the reign of King Solomon and his father David, the Psalms in our Old Testament were songs that were used in worship in the Jewish temple. Possibly Psalm 82 or one like it was sung in the temple dedication service described in 2 Chronicles chapter 6. Possibly King Solomon's prayer was preceded or followed by the lyrics that God had taken the highest place of authority in the divine council. In this song, the Hebrew people acknowledged that there might be other gods of other nations. There might even be other gods competing for their own attention and allegiance. But those other small-g gods didn't come anywhere close to the big-G God's ultimate righteousness and power. The God of Israel was the one who determined what was holy and right: to give justice to the weak and the orphan, to maintain the rights of the poor and destitute, to rescue the lowly and the needy, and to deliver them all from the power of the wicked.

The God who was characterized in this way, the God who held these values, was the only God worthy of worship. This and only this God is the one who is our Father in heaven, whose name is holy. This is the God for whom we can stand up, raise our voices in song, and lift our hands in exaltation. A major purpose of prayer—for King Solomon, for the Psalmists, and for all of us Judeo-Christian people ever since—is to meditate on and honor these divine and holy characteristics of God our heavenly father.

3—GOD’S WILL ON EARTH AS IN HEAVEN

Of course, prayer isn’t only about worshiping and adoring God in heaven. Prayer is also about seeking that God’s holy will be done *on earth* as it is in heaven. Prayer is asking that the ideal characteristics and values of God become practical realities in the everyday life of God’s people.

We see this in 2 Chronicles 6, verses 18-21, where King Solomon prays that God would reside with mortals on earth. Solomon acknowledges that God is too great to be contained even by the highest heaven. Yet, the king’s prayer invited God to dwell also in the temple that they were dedicating. Solomon asked that God’s eyes would be open and that God would hear and heed the cries and prayers of the people in that place.

Second Chronicles 7:12-18 gives us even more information about God’s will on earth as it is in heaven. There we see that the big temple dedication service was over. King Solomon had gone home to his palace. Maybe he was still too hyped up to go to sleep, or maybe God woke him up or spoke to him in a dream. But, somehow, in the night, the Lord appeared to Solomon and continued their prayer conversation. This time it was God’s turn to talk.

The Lord told Solomon, that, yes, the Lord had chosen the Jerusalem temple as a place to bring heaven on earth, as a place to bring divinity to humanity, as a place where God’s holy will could be done. But this was a two-sided covenant. God would only be able to do God’s part if the people did theirs. Notice chapter 7, verse 14: “If my people who are called by my name humble themselves, pray, seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land.” In verse 17, God indicated that God’s holy will would be accomplished on earth as in heaven if the people would walk according to God’s commandments, statutes, and ordinances. God’s will could only come on earth if God’s people would do their part to be holy like God in heaven is holy.

In telling God’s side of this prayer conversation with Solomon, the writer of 2 Chronicles was trying to say what so many other biblical writers have communicated. If you want your prayers to be

answered, then you should pray and behave in alignment with God’s holy will. In Micah, chapter 6, for example, that prophet explained that God wasn’t interested in burnt-sacrifices type of worship and prayer. What God wants is that people stop taking advantage of other folks, stop being dishonest, and stop being violent. What God asks is that we do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with our God. If we want God to answer our prayers, then we need to pray for God’s will to be done in and through and by us. As the Lord told King Solomon in the middle of the night—if we are willing to humble ourselves in obedience to God’s holy commandments—then God will hear our prayers, forgive our sins, and heal our land. That’s when God’s holy will *will* be done on earth as it is in heaven.

CONCLUSION

One of the best prayer hymns ever written says,

Prayer is the soul’s sincere desire, uttered or unexpressed,
the motion of a hidden fire that trembles in the breast.
Prayer is the burden of a sigh, the falling of a tear,
the upward glancing of an eye when none but God is near.¹

James Montgomery is credited with writing at least eight verses to that song. But we could add one more that says,

Prayer is that humble act or word that reaches up on high
and brings the holy heart of God into the “What?” and “Why?”
Prayer offers hope to all in need, from life and pain and hurt—
when we but seek God’s holy will and implement on earth.²

¹1818.

²Kimal James, 9/7/19.