



PRAYER: THE HIGHEST FORM OF WORSHIP

“5 And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. 6 But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly. 7 But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking. 8 Be not ye therefore like unto them: for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him. 9 After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. 10 Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven. 11 Give us this day our daily bread. 12 And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. 13 And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen. 14 For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: 15 But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.”

- Matthew 6:5-15

Prayer: The Highest Form of Worship

I want to begin by looking at Matthew 6:9 and 10, these familiar words of our Lord, “Pray, then, in this way: ‘Our Father who is in heaven, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on Earth as it is in heaven.’” Very familiar words to us. This is the substantive, foundational, basic teaching that our Lord gave us on how to pray. This is How to Pray 101.

But as I look at the simplicity of that instruction on how to pray and compare that with what is going on in the evangelical world today, I’m in deep distress over that. It was a few months ago that we did a series on Romans 8, and we looked hard at Romans 8 and the true work of the Holy Spirit. Remember that? And we contrasted it with the false claims of the Charismatic Movement, the Pentecostal Movement which abuses and blasphemes the Holy Spirit.

When it comes to the nature of prayer, the essence of prayer, what prayer is, they are completely at the opposite end of the truth. There are many heresies in that movement; maybe none is more ubiquitous than the heresy as to the nature of prayer.

And, of course, prayer is our lifeline. Prayer is our communion with God. Prayer is the means by which we speak to God. And whatever it is that God has designed for us to do in praying is what we ought to do and not something else. There are currently about half-a-billion self-proclaimed charismatics in the world – five hundred million of them. And dominant among them, and largely all of them adhere to one or another element of this, is this prosperity gospel, this “name it and claim it” kind of aberrant deception. For them, prayer is a personal force – a personal force that will bring you whatever you want; that’s what it is. It is a creative force; it is a creative power; it is a creative energy by which you attract any object or any experience or any situation that you want.

It works like this: know what you want, believe you will receive it, visualize its arrival, and speak it into existence. Those are the four steps, and you find them with everybody from Benny Hinn to Joel Osteen and everybody in between. This is essentially the principle of prayer: know what you want. That’s where it starts. If you don’t know what you want, this

thing isn't going to get off the ground. Believe you will receive it. Visualize its appearance, and then your words, in that context, can speak it into existence. This is called the "law of attraction." You will attract what you create by your faith expressed in words. In a sense, this is how you pray.

One writer says, and I quote, "It works every time, just place your order." In fact, they tell us that when you pray that way, you shift the universe to make your desires happen for you. This is how millions of people are being taught to pray around the world: decide what you want, believe you're going to get it, visualize receiving it, and speak it into existence; you create whatever you want. And the list does not sound like this: holiness, righteousness, purity, humility, brokenness. No, no. The list is all material: health, wealth, success, prosperity, privilege. You speak, in this kind of prayer, faith words that bring into existence what you want.

This kind of confident prayer activates God for your desires, and God is just sitting up there waiting to be activated. They will even tell you He can't do anything until you push this button. And this has infected half-a-billion people who call themselves Christians, a pseudo kind of church across the planet where they have turned prayer into a mechanism by which they get what they want from God – who is obliged to supply it.

Let me have you look with me at James chapter 4 for a moment – James chapter 4. Here is a perspective that I think these people need to have, and it would do you well to have it as well, lest you be drawn away by this. In James chapter 4 and verse 3, we read familiar words, "You ask and do not receive" – you ask and do not receive; you ask God, and you don't receive – why? – "because you ask with wrong motives" – what is your wrong motive? – "you want to spend it on your desires."

So, here's a new principle that I would like to advocate whatever you ask, simply because you desire it, you will not get. This is the exact opposite of everything that is part of that Positive Confession Movement. James says, "You ask, and you do not receive because you are asking to satisfy your own pleasures. This puts you in the category, verse 4 of an adulteress. What does that mean? You have deviated from your true love who is God, and you're having an affair with the world. "This," he says, "is friendship with the world, and that is hostility toward God."

When you ask for material things – cars, houses, more money, health, all of those kinds of things – you have literally become an adulteress. You have defected from the one you say you love – God – and you have taken up an affair – an illicit affair – with the world, and that is hostility toward God. And if you do that, you have just become the enemy of God. You have just become the enemy of God.

Verse 5 says, “Do you think that the Scripture speaks to no purpose” – and then he quotes something that is not specifically in the Old Testament; it’s sort of a summation; the NAS says, ““He jealously desires the Spirit which He has made to dwell in us’?” It’s a hard verse – a hard line to translate. It’s better to translate it this way: not Spirit in the Holy Spirit sense, but spirit in the sense of the human spirit. So, it would be translated this way, ““The spirit which He has made to dwell in us lusts with envy”” – don’t you get it? You’ve been warned that what your desires want, what comes out from in you is envious lust. You want more and more out of envy. This is all illicit and is adultery and is defection from God.

So, this is a promise that whatever in this world you lust for, you will not receive from God. There’s the truth. There’s the message to the half-a-billion Health-Wealth advocates around the globe. But no one can make money preaching that as a Ponzi scheme. What is the true purpose of prayer? Is it to get you what you want? Is the true purpose of prayer to shift the cosmic order, to manipulate God for the purpose of giving you earthly, material, worldly possessions and privileges that are simply the longings of your fallen lusts? Is that it?

These people aren’t off a little bit; they have taken up a posture that puts them in the category of being enemies of God, spiritual adulteresses, enemies of God, hostile toward God. Because what they’re saying is, “God, it’s not about what you want; it’s about what I want. I don’t exist to serve You; You exist to serve me.” That is a form of blatant idolatry. That is a kind of blasphemy that violates the first commandment to have no other gods and to worship the Lord your God and no other. Nothing could be further from biblical prayer than that. This is not Christianity; this isn’t close to Christianity; this does not honor God; this is just the opposite.

How are we to pray? We just learned. How about this, “Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on Earth as it is in

heaven.” It’s not about me; it’s about You. It’s not about what I want; it’s about what You want. It’s not about what elevates me; it’s what elevates You. It’s not about what aggrandizes me; it’s what aggrandizes You.

So, I just want to talk about that for about a half-an-hour a little bit and show you some illustrations of the appropriate kind of praying. And by the way, just to begin, prayers in the Bible are, for the most part, very brief. Very brief. We’ve been reading through Psalm 119. And you might consider Psalm 119 as a prayer. Certainly, there are statements made in that Psalm, of course, from beginning to end that are directed at God about His Word, but it isn’t technically a prayer. It is simply a recitation of the psalmist’s love for and trust in the Word of God. But it certainly has components of prayer in that he praises God for His Word, and he acknowledges his sin and all of that. But it’s not technically a prayer; it’s sort of a paean of praise for the glory of Scripture.

If you eliminate Psalm 119 in the sense of a prayer, the longest prayer in the entire Old Testament is Nehemiah chapter 9, and it runs from verse 5 to verse 38, and you can read it in seven minutes. Seven minutes. The longest prayer in the New Testament would be John 17, the prayer of our Lord Jesus, and there’s 26 verses, and you can read it in less than seven minutes. Those are the longest prayers in the Old Testament and the New Testament. So, I’m saying to you that prayer, in the Scripture, tends to be brief. The longest in the Old – seven minutes. The longest in the New – perhaps less than that.

For example, here’s a prayer, Luke 18:13, the prayer of the publican, “God, be merciful to me, a sinner! Amen.” Here’s another prayer, Luke 23:42, the thief on the cross, “Remember me when You come in Your kingdom!” Remember me when You come in Your kingdom. Here’s the shortest prayer in the Bible, “Lord, save me!” Remember who prayed that prayer? Peter when he was sinking. He didn’t get very verbal. It was pretty simple, “Lord, save me!” Most of the prayers in the Scripture are very brief, very terse, very pointed, very specific, very simple, and very clear. He’s, we know that Jesus prayed longer prayers to His Father. Yes, we know, according to Luke 6:12, He spent all night in prayer, and He did that frequently with His Father in that divine communication. We don’t have any records of those prayers. The only private prayer we have of Jesus is John 17, those 26 verses.

Well, what was He doing all night? Well, there's no question about the fact that He was communing with the Father as one member of the Trinity to the other in some kind of divine conversation that would be beyond our comprehension. It wouldn't have been one long multi-hour prayer, but it would no doubt have been a series of short, punctuated, brief, passionate communications with the Father. He spent all night in prayer. He loved the solitude when He could commune with the Father for a prolonged period of time. But those were the private prayers; those were the closet prayers. His public prayers were all very short, very brief, very plain, very direct, like this prayer that we read about in Matthew 6, and I only read you the first half. The last half goes, "Give us this day our daily bread. Forgive us our trespasses" – our sins. "And lead us not into temptation." Very brief, very to the point. This is not to say that there's no place for long prayers, pouring out the heart, but that's in the closet. That's a private place.

The prayers that you see in the Bible are prayers of passion, prayers of urgency, prayers of eagerness, prayers of zeal. And they tend to be short and to the point. The disciples come to Jesus in Luke 11. Even after they've heard the Sermon on the Mount and heard the instruction I read to you in chapter 6, they come to Him later in Luke 11, and they say, "Lord, teach us to pray. How is it that we can learn to pray the way You pray?" So, this is public that they've heard Him pray. He can't teach them to commune with the Father all night in that inner-Trinitarian communion, but He can teach them how He prayed in front of them.

So, they ask, in Luke 11:1, "Teach us to pray," and they gave them this short prayer that you can recite very quickly. First thing to say is it's not the Lord's prayer, because it says, "Forgive us our trespasses," and He had none. It's not the Lord's prayer, because it says, "Lead us not into temptation," and He had no fear of temptation because of His absolute holiness. But He's teaching them how we ought to pray; it's the disciple's prayer. It is succinct; it is unpretentious. There are no wasted words; there is no repetition; there's no ostentation; there's no ceremony; there's no redundancy.

"Our father who art in heaven, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on Earth as it is in heaven. Give us our bread. Forgive us for our sins. Lead us not into temptation, and in the end You receive the glory." That's the prayer. It's a pattern for praying. It's a pattern for praying pointedly, directly, specifically, clearly, simply.

That's the big picture, but I want to narrow that down, but primarily – and this is what I'm after today – primarily, it is an expression of worship. Worship. Let me say it this way; the distilled essence of worship is this kind of prayer. The distilled essence of worship is this kind of prayer. The requests? Very simple: bread, life, nothing more; forgiveness, protection from devastating temptation. This is basic awareness of our sinfulness. We don't even have the power to gain our own bread unless God allows it. We can't ever deal on our own with our own sin. We can't protect ourselves from the enemy. This is the sinner recognizing his weakness. But before the sinner recognizes his weakness, the sinner recognizes the priority of God. In this prayer, the sinner is lowly, abject, humble, broken, dependent. But first, the sinner is a worshiper. A worshiper.

Sometimes I think we would think of worship as different than prayer. And certainly, in the Charismatic Movement, they would pride themselves on being worshippers. They go on and on and on and on and on with emotionally charged music that induces people into a kind of silly stupor by repeating itself again and again and again and again. This is not worship. And then, after they've done all of that, they start telling God what He has to do for them, which is an affront to Him. True prayer is the distilled essence of worship, while many think of prayer as nothing more than a way to get what they want, reducing prayer to some kind of a selfish superstition.

I just might add this; I couldn't even find, in all the world of paganism, any pagan religious system that teaches that you can get what you want out of your deity. That isn't even in paganism. Even pagans understand that they are at the mercy of their deity, not that that deity is at their mercy. This you don't even find in paganism, and yet it's invented and placed in Christianity. Faith and positive confession become a kind of blind credulity in which you tell God what you want.

And by the way, if you have any doubt – rational doubt or biblical doubt – you're not going to get it. This is nothing to do with prayer, has nothing to do with God. And I promise you, you ask on that basis and you will not receive - James 4. If prayer is anything, it is the highest form of worship that an individual can participate in, because prayer is saying, "God, Your name, Your kingdom, Your will be elevated, not my will, not my kingdom, not my name."

Now you say, "Is this a new trend?"

Well, yes and no. When I grew up, I grew up in a kind of fundamentalist environment as a kid. And there was a kind of a heroic figure, on the horizon, who was a well-known Bible teacher and influenced a lot of people. His name was John R. Rice. I heard him preach, met him and some of his family members. He wrote a book in 1942.

John R. Rice wrote a book in 1942, a book on prayer. And in the book, he said this, and I quote, “Prayer is not praise, adoration, humiliation, or confession, but asking. Praise is not prayer, and prayer is not praise. Prayer is asking. Adoration is not prayer, and prayer is not adoration. Prayer is always asking. It is not anything else but asking.” End quote.

John R. Rice was a very looming figure in the world of the fundamental churches, and people bought into this for decades. That became the agenda for prayer: it’s just asking. How bizarre; how untrue.

Our Lord says prayer is primarily praise, primarily adoration, primarily humiliation, primarily confession, “I need you to feed me; I need you to forgive me; I need you to protect me. You are the great God.”

The disciple’s prayer, then, is instruction on how to worship. And when you worship personally, it’s in this way. Prayer is the highest form of worship – the highest form of worship. And along the way, 1 John 5:14 says, “You can have this confidence that if we ask anything according to His will” – what? – “He hears us, and we have the petitions we ask.” According to His will. Do you want something God doesn’t want for you? I don’t want anything God doesn’t want for me. And I want everything God wants for me. Godly prayer is worship, acknowledging His sovereign will and our utter dependence; confessing His glory and our sin; affirming our reliance on His wisdom, His grace, His power, His preservation, His protection, and confessing our own importance and weakness.

The God-centered nature of the disciple’s prayer is obvious: Your name, Your kingdom, Your will. How in the world can half-a-billion people call themselves Christians and think that prayer is speaking what you want at God and believing that He has to give it to you? This is blasphemous. The purpose of all prayer is God’s honor, God’s purpose, God’s glory; never

to advance my name, my enterprises, my desires, my success. That, dear friends, is taking the Lord's name in vain, and God will not hear that kind of prayer.

So, the faulty theology that underlines this is a serious error at the point of the very nature of God. That's serious. It strikes a blow at worshiping God, which is the first commandment, "Worship God and Him alone, no other god. Worship the true God in the true way." These people who think they have a corner on worship don't worship at all. They dishonor God. Prayer is an act of worship. To offer any kind of prayer based on a perverted view of God is equal to worshiping an idol, a false god. To say it bluntly, it is blasphemy to think of God as your slave. That's blasphemy.

Let's go to the Bible and look at a few, very briefly, of the really amazing prayers. Go back to Jeremiah 32. Jeremiah 32. Jeremiah, the weeping prophet. Why was he called the weeping prophet? Because he was crying all the time. Which was he crying all the time? Because nobody would listen to what he said. Was he crying because he took it personally? No. He was crying because he understood what would happen to the people because they didn't listen. He wasn't crying because he wasn't popular; he was crying because judgment was going to fall on their heads, and they were going to be destroyed in the Babylonian captivity when the Chaldeans invaded. And that's exactly what happened.

Jeremiah preached again and again and again and again to the people. They wouldn't hear him; they wouldn't listen to him. Instead, they listened to false preachers; they listened to false prophets; they listened to lying prophets; they wouldn't listen to the truth. They finally took Jeremiah, and they captured him, and they imprisoned him. When you come to chapter 32, he's been thrown in prison; he's a prisoner. It's a sad end to this amazingly faithful man. He has been abused, mistreated, maligned, and now thrown in a pit. In a pit. For all he knows, they're going to kill him. No measurable success, nobody listening to him. He says, "Your words were found, and I did eat them. And they were in me the joy and rejoicing of my heart. I heard; I believed; I rejoiced in Your words, no one else."

In response to that, in the pit he prays. And I want you to see the character of his prayer. He's praying in the pit. Now, from a charismatic standpoint, what he needs to do is speak a new reality into existence. First of all, he needs to decide that he doesn't want to be in a pit; he

wants to be in a palace. And then he has to believe that he can be in a palace. He has to visualize himself in a palace and then speak it into existence. That's not what he does.

Verse 17 is his prayer, "Ah Lord God!" I want you to notice the nature of this prayer.

Hungry, if not starving; lonely; devastated because he knows a crushing judgment is going to fall on his people. "Behold, You made the heavens and the Earth by Your great power and by Your outstretched arm! Nothing is too difficult for You" – hmm. He affirms that this has happened to him within the will of God because God is almighty, all powerful. Not only that, but He's also kind and loving. "You show lovingkindness to thousands but repay the iniquity of fathers into the bosom of their children after them, O great and mighty God. The Lord of hosts is His name" – what's he doing? What's he doing? He's worshiping God. He's praising God. "You're great in counsel" – verse 19 – "and mighty in deed; Your eyes are open to all the ways of the sons of men, giving to everyone according to his ways and according to the fruit of his deeds; who has set signs and wonders in the land of Egypt, and even to this day both in Israel and among mankind." And he goes back on the history of what God has done when He delivered the people out of Egypt with the plagues. "You made a name for yourself as it is this day." Hallowed be – what? – Your name. This is praise.

"You brought Your people Israel out of the land of Egypt with signs and wonders, and a strong hand and an outstretched arm with great terror. You gave them this land, which You swore to their forefathers to give them, a land flowing with milk and honey. They came in and took possession of it; they did not obey Your voice or walk in Your Law; they have done nothing of all that You commanded them to do; therefore, You have made all this calamity come upon them. Behold, the siege ramps have reached the city to take it."

Now, that's his prayer. Do you see any requests there? There aren't any. "Lord, get me out of this pit. Lord, why are you letting this happen to me?" None. There is no request; there's nothing about his pain. There's nothing about his suffering. There's nothing about his rejection. There's nothing about his dilemma. There's no hope for the future. He celebrates the power and the sovereignty and the lovingkindness and the justice and the judgment of God.

"And the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah saying, 'I am the Lord, the God of all flesh; is anything too difficult for Me?'" You're right, Jeremiah. Jeremiah rested in the sovereign

decisions that God would make, that they were just, they were loving toward the faithful, that nothing was outside His power. No requests.

An even deeper dilemma is found in the story of a man named Jonah. Go to Jonah chapter 2. In chapter 1, Jonah gets picked up, according to verse 15, and thrown into the sea. The sea stops raging, and God appoints a great fish to swallow Jonah. And Jonah's I this thing for three days and three nights. This is unbelievable. A man in the toxic, acidic belly of a great fish for three days and three nights? This could generate some prayer requests. "Get me out of here." If Jonah knew the positive confession approach, all he needed to do was decide that he would rather be on a cruise ship, believe he could be in a cruise ship, visualize a cruise ship, then speak it into existence.

So, Jonah prayed. He starts to pray, in chapter 2:1 to 10. "I called out of my distress" – from the stomach of the fish – "to the Lord, and He answered me. I cried for help from the depth of Sheol; You heard my voice. You had cast me into the deep, into the heart of the seas, and the current engulfed me." He's looking back and describing the event of praying there.

Then in verse 4, he says, "So, I said" – so, here's his prayer - "I have been expelled from Your sight" - that's the first thing he said: Lord, I'm down here in this fish, a long way from where I can be seen - "Nevertheless, I will look again toward Your holy temple." Wow

"Water encompassed me to the point of death," he says looking back, "and the deep engulfed me, and weeds were wrapped around my head. And I descended to the root of the mountains" – you know, the mountains I the sea, all the way down to the foot of the mountains, down in the depth of the sea. "The Earth with its bars was around me forever, but You have brought up my life from the pit, O Lord my God.

"While I was fainting away" – here's his prayer - "I remembered the Lord, and my prayer came to You, into Your holy temple. Those who regard vain idols forsake their faithfulness, but I will sacrifice to You with the vice of" – what? - "thanksgiving. That which I have vowed I will pay. Salvation is from the Lord." He's having a praise service down there. Did you notice there's no request here? There's not one request in his prayer. He doesn't ask for anything. That kind of theology and that kind of worship was too much for the fish, and it vomited Jonah up. Not one single request. He just recognized. He just recognized God: "God

is sovereign; God is holy; God in His temple; God high and lifted up, all for the glory of God.”

One other illustration in this kind of praying, which is the epitome of worship, can be found in Daniel’s life, in the ninth chapter of Daniel - the ninth chapter of Daniel. Daniel, of course, as you remember, is sort of caught in the transition between the Babylonian Empire and the Medo-Persian. The Babylonians had conquered Jerusalem, taken Daniel captive with his three friends when they were young. Eventually, Daniel rises to power, as you know. There’s a transition during Daniel’s life. The Medo-Persians take over the kingdom from the Babylonians. So, Daniel is caught in the transition between these two massive world empires, and he’s interceding for his people. He wants his people to go back to the land and be restored. And that’s the nature of his prayer.

And what generates it is in chapter 9. He’s reading Jeremiah. According to verse 2, he’s reading Jeremiah the prophet. And in Jeremiah chapter 25, and Jeremiah 29, Jeremiah says that the captivity will be 70 years. Jeremiah said that before it happened.

And so, he reads that, and he says, “Wow, the 70 years are almost up, so I’m going to pray. I’m going to pray that the Lord will deliver these people. It’s been a horrendous issue. They were taken captive in three deportations, the last one in 586. Thousands upon thousands, tens of thousands were slaughtered and massacred. Jerusalem was destroyed, the temple was destroyed, the people were hauled off captive from the southern kingdom of Judah. They had been in that pagan land, compromised, as you know. And you know the whole story of the lion’s den and all of that and how they were mistreated. It’s a terrible story of what’s happened to these people.

Daniel decides to intercede. Since the Scripture says 70 years, he’s going to say, “Okay, God, would you honor that promise?” Verse 3, “I gave my attention to the Lord God to seek Him by prayer and supplication, with fasting, sackcloth and ashes. He comes humbly, in a broken way. Sackcloth and ashes were a demonstration of one’s own humiliation. Comes fasting.

And he prayed, verse 4, “I prayed to the Lord my God, and I confessed and said” – notice the prayer - ““Alas, O Lord, the great and awesome God, who keeps His covenant and lovingkindness for those who love Him and keep His commandments”” – that’s hallowed by

Your name – isn't it – Your kingdom come, Your will be done. He's affirming the glory of God. This is the purest form of personal worship: prayer. Prayer that praises God.

And the second component is, verse 5, “We have sinned, committed iniquity, acted wickedly, rebelled, turning from Your commandments and ordinances.” That's how you pray. You pray, “Your will, Your name, Your glory; and I'm a sinner, and I deserve nothing, be merciful to me.” That's how he prayed.

Verse 6, “We've not listened to Your servants the prophets” – many of them came before the captivity; they didn't listen – “they spoke in Your name to our kings, our princes, our fathers and all the people of the land.”

And then he turns again, “Righteousness belongs to You, O Lord, but to us open shame.” Verse 8, “Open shame belongs to us, O Lord, to our kings, our princes, our fathers, because we sinned against You. To the Lord our God belong compassion and forgiveness” – see; he's going between what he is and who God is, what his people are.

By the way, the plural pronouns mean that he identified with the sins of his people. “We have not obeyed” – verse 10 – “the voice of the Lord our God to walk in His teachings which he set before us through His servants the prophets. Indeed, all Israel has transgressed Your Law and turned aside, not obeying Your voice; so the curse has been poured out on us, along with the oath which was written in the Law of Moses the servant of God, for we have sinned against Him.”

Some of these people in the prosperity thing ought to say to God, “You know, God, maybe I'm in the dilemma that I'm in because I've sinned against You. I'm a sinner, O God; I deserve nothing. And maybe I'm in the desperate situation I'm in now because I have sinned against you.”

Verse 12, “Thus He has confirmed His words which He had spoken against us and against our rulers who ruled us, to bring on us great calamity; under the whole heaven there's not been done anything like what was done to Jerusalem.” That's how bad the destruction of Jerusalem and the Solomonic temple was. “As it is written in the Law of Moses, all this calamity has come on us; yet we have not sought the favor of the Lord our God by turning

from our iniquity and giving attention to Your truth. Therefore, the Lord has kept the calamity in store and brought it on us; for the Lord our God is righteous with respect to all His deeds which He has done, but we have not obeyed His voice.” He just goes back and forth between the sinfulness of man and the righteousness of God. That’s the essence of true worship.

“And now” – verse 15 - “O Lord our God, who have brought Your people out of the land of Egypt with a mighty hand and have made a name for Yourself” – it’s about Your name - “as it is this day – we have sinned, we have been wicked. O Lord, in accordance with Your righteous acts, let now Your anger and Your wrath turn away from Your city Jerusalem, Your holy mountain; for because of our sins and the iniquities of our fathers, Jerusalem and Your people have become a reproach to all those around us.” Here’s the problem that Daniel has. “God, Your reputation is suffering.”

Because the nations are saying, “What kind of God is the God of Israel? He couldn’t protect them from the Babylonians. The Babylonians came, wiped out Jerusalem, massacred tens of thousands of people, destroyed the temple, hauled the rest off in captivity. What kind of God is the God of Israel?” This is a shift because there was a long time there when everybody said, “You better be careful of the God of Israel; look what He did to the Egyptians. The God of Israel is a mighty God who delivered them out of Egypt.” Now all of a sudden the reputation of God has changed in the pagan world, and Daniel is concerned about the name of God. “Your city and Your name are a reproach.”

Then look at verse 17 how he concludes the prayer. “So now, our God, listen to the prayer of Your servant and to his supplications, and for Your sake, O Lord, let Your face shine on Your desolate sanctuary.” For Your name, Your kingdom, Your glory. “O y God, incline Your ear and hear! Open Your eyes and see our desolations and the city which is called by Your name; for we are not presenting our supplications before You on account of any merits of our own, but on account of Your great compassion. O Lord, hear! O Lord, forgive! O Lord, listen and take action! For Your own sake, O my God, do not delay, because Your city and Your people are called by Your name.”

So, how do I pray? “Whatever glorifies Your name, whatever advances Your name, whatever extends Your kingdom, whatever accomplishes Your will, that’s how I pray.” And anything

other than that is a perversion of prayer. That's how Jeremiah, in the most horrible of circumstances, prayed. That's how Jonah, in the most frightening of circumstances prayed. And that's how Daniel, in the most desperate of circumstances prayed. That's how we pray. These men, these three prophets gathered up all praise, all adoration, all humiliation, all confession and brought it before God. The glory, the greatness, the majesty of God, the humiliation, sinfulness, the wretchedness, the unworthiness of man, that is the stuff of real praying.

So, I say again, prayer is the most distilled essence of personal worship. And if it is to be worship, then it's going to be like this, where you're calling on God's glory and not your own promotion. Jesus said, "Father, glorify Your name."

And the Father essentially said, "I have, and I will. I have, and I will."

One of my favorite heroes of the Scottish Covenanters was Richard Cameron. I've read a lot about him through the years and mentioned him in past times. Richard Cameron was a great preacher of the gospel. And the English tried to force Scotland to become Roman Catholic, and the Scottish resisted that, and they fought against the English to maintain their commitment to the gospel and the faith of the Reformation. And they did it by signing a national covenant. Tens of thousands of them signed a national covenant to be faithful to the reformed faith and not succumb to Catholicism. The Catholic came against them; it was a great slaughter. The conflict lasted for decades. People died, and mostly Scottish blood was shed. The preachers and pastors had to leave the churches and go and preach in the moors and the hillsides because they were hiding. There's a hay market square in the city of Edinburgh, where I've been a number of times, and it's where many of them were burned at the stake. You can go there and see, and there's some plaques there that tell you about it. But one of the most famous of them was Richard Cameron.

One day, he was at his house where he was secluded and kept escaping from death. And a messenger came to him with a box. And he opened the box, and you may remember the story. In the box were two hands. And they were the hands of his son who was also a gospel preacher. And he made a comment about, "Those are my own son's hands." He recognized them. And soon after that, another box came, and it had his son's head in it. And it was

delivered to him as testimony to what was going to happen – to continue to happen if they didn't align with the Roman Catholic Church.

Historians have written down that this was Richard Cameron's response, "It is the Lord's will and good is the will of the Lord. He has never wronged me." End quote. In the midst of an unspeakable tragedy, there's nobility in the confidence that the will of God is everything. Everything. That's prayer as worship.