

Intercessory Prayer

'Who is there to condemn us? Will Jesus the Messiah, Who died, or rather, Who was raised from the dead, Who is at the right hand of God actually interceding for us?' (Romans 8:34).

'So too the Holy Spirit comes to our aid and bears us up in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Holy Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep to be uttered; and He Who searches the hearts of men knows what is in the mind of the Holy Spirit because the Holy Spirit intercedes on behalf of God's people according to and in harmony with God's will' (Romans 8:26 & 27).

In these verses we are told that Jesus and the Holy Spirit intercede for us, God's people. The ministry of intercession is the highest and most powerful ministry open to any Christian. These prayers are not only deep prayers uttered on behalf of people, for healing and other problems, they can also bring about change in personal circumstances, changes in our area, city or nation, and can hold back God's divine judgement. Intercessory prayer solves problems that cannot be solved in any other way. Problems of individuals, families and of whole nations. In Hebrew, the word intercession means 'to come in between'. An intercessor comes in between God and the problems of mankind; he stands before God on behalf of others.

When we are called to intercede on the behalf of another person, we often feel a heaviness – sometimes a feeling of desperation. It is as though we 'take on' the problem of the other person, but these feelings are normal for the intercessor. The first time this happens, we can feel a little bit confused and wonder what is going on. Once we have prayed through the problem, the heavy feeling usually turns to a sense of elation and relief. Then all we need to do is faithfully wait to see the outcome of our prayers. Sometimes the answer comes quickly, sometimes it takes years.

'If My people who are called by My name will humble themselves and pray, and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven, forgive their sin and heal their land. Now My eyes will be open and My ears attentive to prayer offered in this place' (2 Chronicles 7:14).

Sometimes intercessors can save a city or a nation by standing before the Lord on behalf of that place. Intercessors are people who are close to the heart of God. Four excellent examples of intercessors are Abraham, Moses, Daniel and Esther. God will do nothing until he reveals His secrets to His prophets (Amos 3:7) and Abraham was a prophet, so God revealed His plans regarding Sodom and Gomorrah to him. It seems that Abraham was so concerned that the Lord would judge the righteous along with the unrighteous, he interceded on behalf of the cities. If we open our Bible and study all of Genesis chapter 18 (there is too much to put in here), we will read some important aspects of the intercessor. Notice the words in verses 22 & 23, 'Abraham was still standing before the Lord then he came close to the Lord'. It is obvious that Abraham was intimately acquainted with the Lord and was

called God's friend (verse 17) and here, Abraham was reverently talking with God, not praying, but discussing the situation with the Lord. We need to notice the boldness of Abraham, but with a deeply reverend attitude. He was actually challenging God's righteousness and he was not afraid to speak out and say what was on his heart. Abraham had a deep conviction of God's justice – both to punish the wicked and not to deal with the righteous the same as the wicked.

We need to see that God responds to the prayers of His servants when we are interceding for others. God does not brush us aside but He listens. We have a wonderful privilege to be able to speak to God like this, on behalf of other people. After much research, we estimate that there were at least 10,000 people living in the immediate area surrounding Sodom and Gomorrah. We need to study Genesis 18:23 to 32 to read exactly how Abraham interceded for these people. If we look at this in ratio, we can see that for approximately 10,000 people, if there were only ten righteous people, God would spare all the rest of them. So we can see that one righteous person can ward off judgement for one thousand; 1% of the population need to be praying people, to stop God's judgement on the whole nation. We are not talking about mere churchgoers; we mean righteous, holy, genuine, dedicated, upright, Spirit-filled believers. We can protect our communities and bring God's favour to our neighbours, just by being righteous; just be being there and by praying for our area. Any Christian in any country can pray for their nation. Our presence can cause God to hold back His righteous judgement from an entire community, city or nation.

Passivity and indifference in the face of evil, is sinful. 'Any person who knows what is right to do but does not do it, to him it is sin' (James 4:17). An example of this is; if our government wants to pass a law that is contrary to scripture and evil in the sight of God, and we know that law is about to be passed and we act passively, and do not pray against that law being passed and do not do all we can to stop it, then that becomes sin. Another example is; if we suspect a man in our neighbourhood is a paedophile, and we do not pray against that man's sin and pray for the protection of the local children and do not do all we can to stop the situation continuing, that is sin. If we do know of this extreme wickedness and can report a paedophile to the authorities, then we must. A third example is; if we hear of an 'expo' to promote witchcraft and magic coming to our area, and we do not pray against it and do not do all we can to stop it, that is sin because we are passively condoning the sins of witchcraft and magic, which are abominations to the Lord our God. There are many other examples of passive sin.

Moses interceded for Israel when he was on top of Mount Sinai, communing with God and receiving the revelation of God's purpose and plan for Israel. If we open our Bible and study all of Exodus chapter 32, we can read how Moses interceded for Israel. Neither the Lord nor Moses wanted responsibility for the people at this point in time; both the Lord and Moses were so angry with Israel, they disowned them. The Lord said to Moses, "Your people, whom you have brought out of Egypt" (verse 7) and later Moses said to the Lord, "Why does Your wrath blaze against Your people whom You have brought

forth out of the land of Egypt” (verse 11). God Himself, was going to destroy the whole nation of Israel (verse 10). This exchange would be comical if it wasn't so serious. If it were not for Moses being bold enough to speak firmly to the Lord and remind Him of the promises He made to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, we would not have the Jews with us at all! I wonder if anyone has thought of that fact? Then Moses interceded for them and caused God to change His mind (verse 14). God said, “Let Me alone” (verse 10). Meaning, if Moses stepped aside God would act on His wrath, but as long as Moses stood before the Lord, God would not act. That is the job of the intercessor – to stand in the gap between God and man. Just having the presence of the intercessor there is enough to stop God's wrath. Imagine Almighty God saying, “Let Me alone” but the marvellous thing about Moses was – he would not let God alone to destroy Israel – he stayed there and held on, pleading for the people. By that one act, Moses saved a whole nation – he saved the Jews, and from them, came our salvation. That is the power of intercession. Moses and Aaron became intercessors together. When the Lord sought to destroy all the Israelites once again (Numbers 16:45) Aaron had changed from being the problem (Exodus 32:1 to 6), to becoming an intercessor who was part of the solution (Numbers 16:45 to 48).

We need to study the whole of the book of Daniel, to see the fullness of how Daniel interceded and repented on behalf of Israel, with dramatic results. Here are just a few verses taken from the book of Daniel. Daniel got down on his knees and prayed three times every day (Daniel 6:9, 10 & 13). There was a decree written that made it illegal for people to pray to anyone but King Darius (Daniel 6:7), but Daniel would not give up his prayers, even if it meant death, and he was thrown to the lions but God delivered him (Daniel 6:16 & 22). Clearly, Daniel was not only a man of great prayers, he was a man who knew the scriptures as we will show. Our direction for our intercessory prayers should always come from the scriptures. Daniel was third ruler (or third in line from the top) in the kingdom of the Persian Empire (Daniel 5:29). Daniel realised the seventy years of exile from Jerusalem had almost run their course, and it was time for God to restore Jerusalem to the Jewish people once again. Daniel responded to this revelation with the correct action. He knew the scriptures well, so where did he find this in the scriptures? In Jeremiah 25:11 & 12 and 29:10; ‘And the nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years; then when the seventy years are completed, I will punish the king of Babylon and that nation for their iniquity’. ‘When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will visit you and keep My good promise to you, causing you to return to Jerusalem’.

Daniel fasted and sought the Lord, wearing sackcloth and ashes (Daniel 9:3). We can also repent on behalf of our nation. Daniel was a very righteous man and there is no record of sin in his life, yet he repeatedly said, “We have sinned; we have done this wrong and that wrong; our sins and iniquities; confessing my sin and the sin of my people.” He could have been self-righteous and said, “Israel has sinned. They have done this and that wrong,” but he was humble enough to include himself in that prayer of repentance for Israel (Daniel 9:5 to 20). Daniel fasted for three weeks before an answer came (Daniel 10:2 & 3).

Queen Esther interceded for the Jews when they were about to be massacred. Again, we need to study the whole book of Esther to understand the complete situation they were in. Esther lived in another phase during the Persian Empire, years after Daniel. She was an orphan who had been adopted and raised by her much older cousin, Mordecai. When the queen (Vashti) of the Persian Empire refused to obey the king (Ahasuerus), he divorced Vashti and married Esther. When the Jews heard of the impending slaughter of their people, Mordecai told Esther she had risen to become queen for just a time as this; that is to save the Jews (Esther 4:13 & 14). Esther told all the Jews to pray and fast for her (Esther 4:16). Esther could have lost her life when she approached the king (Esther 4:11), but she was an intercessor undo death just like Daniel was. Esther survived as did all the Jews and the man who wanted to kill all the Jews was hanged. The Jews were saved because Esther interceded on behalf of her people (Esther 7:4 to 10).

Christians are a kingdom of priests and have come to a 'royal' position (1 Peter 2:9) and have been saved for this time. We cannot turn away from our responsibilities or be indifferent or passive in our prayer life. We need to identify ourselves with the people in our nation, whatever nation we live in, because how can we escape if there is a catastrophe, just like there was going to be for the Jews in Esther's time? (Esther 4:13 & 14). We need to identify ourselves with God's purposes and take up the prayer burden, fasting, kneeling before the Lord or doing whatever is needed to secure an answer and receive mercy from God. Just like Daniel, Esther knew she needed support through fasting and others praying with her, and for her. Just like Esther went into the inner court, so we too need to come into the inner court where the Lord's presence is. Esther's intercession saved the Jewish nation, just like Moses did.

The book of Esther is the unfolding of the consequences of Queen Esther's intercession for her people. When Esther went into the king, she did not go as a beggar. She wore her royal robes and that boldness pleased the king (Esther 5:1). We also need to recognise who we are in God's kingdom. We are not beggars, but kings and priests (Revelation 5:10) who can be bold before God as long as our consciences are clear (1 John 3:21). God has elevated us to that position. We are not to grovel, but we must intercede with absolute reverence in our attitude towards our Lord, and we need to pray in line with the will of God (1 John 5:14). God always listened to Jesus when He prayed because of the reverend attitude Jesus had towards His Father (John 11:41 & 42).

When we pray, we need to be humble, not self-righteous. Look at the example Jesus gave of the Pharisee who went to the temple and prayed, "God I thank you I'm not like the rest of men ... or even like this tax collector here. I fast twice a week, I give tithes of all that I gain."

But the tax collector stood at a distance and would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but kept striking his chest, saying, "O God, be merciful to me, the sinner that I am." Jesus said the tax collector went home forgiven and justified

(Luke 18:11 to 14). The prayer that reaches the heart of God is not the prayer of the Pharisee, but of the man who humbles himself and admits his sin, and says, 'We have sinned', because we are all sinners who need saving, and are saved solely by the grace and mercy of God. Just as God dislikes self-righteousness, God equally hates flattery. It is the same as lying and insincerity. 'They flattered Him with their mouths and lied to Him with their tongues, for their hearts were not sincere, neither were they faithful to His covenant' (Psalm 78:36 & 37).

Here are a few scriptural guidelines to help those who feel God is calling them into the ministry of intercession. We must have a deep intimacy with God. We need to be close enough to God so we can talk face to face like friends, in the way Moses and the Lord did (Exodus 33:11).

We need to have a clear conscience and boldness (1 John 3:21).

We must stand (or kneel) before God, but either way, we need to be in His presence; close to Him (Genesis 18:22 & 23; Daniel 6:10).

We need to almost challenge God to plead our case before Him (Genesis 18:23 to 33; Exodus 32:10 to 13).

We need to have a conviction of God's absolute justice (Genesis 18:23).

We need a concern for the glory of God above our own glory and desires, ambitions and interests like Moses had. God promised to make him a great nation, but Moses completely ignored those words and pleaded for the Jews and he did not leave the presence of God until God changed His mind. (Exodus 32:10 to 14).

We need to have complete dedication to the task like Daniel did (Daniel 6:10).

We need a willingness to identify with those we are interceding for (Daniel 9:5 to 20).

We cannot be self-righteous; we must humble ourselves (Luke 18:11 & 12), then the Lord will hear us (2 Chronicles 7:14).

The one person God looks for in a crisis is an intercessor. We must be willing to pray through a crisis until we receive an answer from the Lord. One way to explain this is; imagine the prayer need is a big bubble of soap. We need to pray right into the bubble. Many people pray into the 'bubble' then they stop praying about it. What we must do is pray and not stop praying until the 'bubble' bursts; that is until we have a breakthrough and we can see for ourselves that the answer has come. Imagine if Moses or Esther stopped interceding half way through the plight of the Jews! It displeases the Lord when there is no one who is willing to intercede (Isaiah 59:15 & 16). Job cried out for an intercessor (Job 9:33). The Lord sought an intercessor to stand in the gap between Him and man, but He did not find one man who was willing; there was not one righteous, praying man in the whole land at that time, so He poured out His indignation and wrath upon the people (Ezekiel 22:30 & 31). When we read this whole text (Ezekiel 22:25 to 31), we need to see who God holds responsible for wickedness in a nation. He blames the false prophets (verse 25), the priests (verse 26), the princes (verse 27) and lastly the people (verse 29). If we look at those titles in the modern world, we see that the Lord puts the blame for wickedness of a nation at the door of the prophets (false prophets who teach lies from the pulpit), priests (spiritual leaders like pastors and elders), princes (secular leaders; governments) and to a lesser degree,

the people. Notice in this scripture, the prophets had covered up the sin (daubed them with whitewash). God did not go to the leaders or a large group of people, but He looked for one certain type of man – a man to stand in the gap – an intercessor. In that desperate situation, one genuine intercessor could have changed the course of that time in history. The scriptures confirm this observation. If we read the history of the Jewish people, we will see that when they had an evil king, the people acted wickedly. When they had a Godly king, the people did well in the sight of God.

How do you see your nation today? Is your nation similar to the days of Ezekiel? Is there guilt and sin in your nation, like every nation around the world? Are you a person who would be willing to stand in the gap and pray for your people? ... your nation? ... your country? Has God called you to be an intercessor to stand in the gap?

Amen and God bless you.

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