

GREAT PRAYERS – Moses Prays

MOSES PRAYS FOR CLARITY

Exodus 33:11-23

God had given Moses the awesome assignment of leading the Israelites from Egypt to Canaan. It was, to say the least, a most daunting and demanding task of leadership and called for super-human wisdom and enablement. Moses knew his limitations, as is evidenced by his arguing with God when God first tapped him on the shoulder and said, “So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt.” (Exodus 3:10) The full story of Moses’ reluctance is recorded in Exodus chapters three and four.

Fast forward now to Exodus 33 where we see the heavy burden of leadership driving Moses to his knees in prayer. This prayer meeting reveals much, both about Moses’ frailty, as well as God’s faithfulness. Moses prays one of the most transparent prayers in the Bible. This communication between Moses and God is very instructive. It reveals that God is indeed a person; that God is a personal God; that God hears prayer; that God answers prayer.

This conversation between a mere man and a mighty God should elevate in our minds, the privilege, the possibilities and the power of prayer. The disciples asked Jesus to “teach us to pray.” (Luke 11:1) We can learn much about praying from Moses’ prayer life as well as Jesus’ prayer life and say, as did the disciples, “teach us to pray.”

There is an interesting pattern that develops in this prayer passage in Exodus 33. You will notice, I am sure, for it is very plain to see, that Moses speaks to God and pauses; then God replies to Moses. Again, Moses speaks and God responds. The pattern of this dialog is repeated throughout the prayer. This pattern is, in itself, instructive.

Prayer is not a one-sided conversation. Prayer is not all talk – prayer is listening as well! We would do well to pray and pause, pray and listen as did Moses. God still speaks – not audibly to us but in and through His written Word. That is why prayer and Bible reading go hand in hand.

Let us now look in upon this sacred scene as the exchange takes place between God and man, between Jehovah and mother Jochebed’s son, between the Almighty and father Amram’s boy. “So the LORD spoke to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend.” (Ex.33:11) “Then Moses said to the LORD” (Ex.33:12) - that’s how it began. Here is how the conversation unfolds:

MOSES: The Assistance He Requested. Ex. 33:12-13

“Moses said to the LORD, “You have been telling me, ‘Lead these people,’ but you have not let me know whom you will send with me. You have said, ‘I know you by name and you have found favor with me.’ If you are pleased with me, teach me your ways so I may know you and continue to find favor with you. Remember that this nation is your people.”

GOD: The Presence He Promised. Ex.33:14

“And He said, “My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest.”

MOSES: The Assurance He Required. Ex.33:15-16

"Then Moses said to him, "If your Presence does not go with us, do not send us up from here. How will anyone know that you are pleased with me and with your people unless you go with us? What else will distinguish me and your people from all the other people on the face of the earth?"

GOD: The Compliance He Granted. Ex.33:17

"And the LORD said to Moses, "I will do the very thing you have asked, because I am pleased with you and I know you by name."

MOSES: The Evidence He Wanted. Ex. 33:18

"Then Moses said, "Now show me your glory."

GOD: The Patience He Exhibited. Ex.33:19-23

"And the LORD said, "I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you, and I will proclaim my name, the LORD, in your presence. I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. But," he said, "you cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live." Then the LORD said, "There is a place near me where you may stand on a rock. When my glory passes by, I will put you in a cleft in the rock and cover you with my hand until I have passed by. Then I will remove my hand and you will see my back; but my face must not be seen."

The prayer meeting is ended. Questions have been asked, clarification has been given, promises have been made and assurance has been received. The man Moses goes on his way to put feet to his prayer.

What an exchange between a mortal man and the mighty God we have been privileged to witness! I have read and re-read this account and each time I come away feeling that I may have intruded upon a very private moment in Moses' life; that I may have crossed over an unseen line and entered into an inner-sanctum to which I was not supposed to have access. This is holy ground! And yet, this is a public record of a very private matter. Evidently God wanted to teach us something about Himself and about prayer.

Moses' holy audacity to verbalize his innermost concerns, his forthrightness, boldness, insistence and utter reliance upon God, mirrored in this prayer, should teach us much about effectual and fervent praying about which James writes in James 5:16. He was reverently comfortable in the Throne Room of Heaven. His example should excite within us a holy enthusiasm regarding our own prayer life; it should encourage us to "carry everything to God in prayer" and to bare our souls, being honest and open with Him who "knows the secrets of the heart" anyway. (Psalm 44:21)

Perhaps the reason we do not profit from prayer as we should is that we do all the talking, informing God about what He already knows, asking God for that which He has already promised to provide for His children. All the while avoiding getting down to the nitty-gritty of dealing with our place in the plan of God as it relates to eternity and the Kingdom of God on earth.

The sacred session between Moses and God took time. It was no spur of the moment glib chatter. Moses spoke and waited upon God to answer. How long he was in the prayer posture I don't know but certainly it was not a quickie "Now I lay me down to sleep, I pray the Lord my soul to keep" variety of praying. Repeatedly in scripture we read of the practice of "waiting upon the Lord."

Probably the most well-known example is Isaiah 40:31 in which we read, "Those who wait on the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint." To "wait upon God", is a familiar phrase in the Bible and a practice throughout the history of the true church up until modern times, when we became so hurried in our harried world that now we can't wait for the next section of the revolving door but push our way ahead and run up the escalator!

No time to wait upon God? It is similar to a student saying to the teacher, "I don't have time to listen, I must get on with my education"; or a football player saying to the coach, "I don't have time to spend with you, I've got to get on with playing the game"; or the pilot of an airplane saying to the control tower, "I don't have time to listen to your instructions, I must get this plane off the runway."

Prayer is not a "drive through" experiment, like driving past the drive-through window at a fast-food restaurant, speaking our request into a microphone and picking up our order on our way out. God does not operate like that. Oh, I know that some may say, "But Peter, when sinking, uttered a fast prayer." Yes, that's ok for water-walkers. But there are not many water-walkers around these days!

Moses was a waiter! He prayed and waited upon God, prayed again and waited upon God. And he was rewarded by hearing that still, small voice giving instruction, direction, assurance and comfort without which he would not and could not proceed to fulfill the great commission that God gave him.

Moses' prayer session comes to an end. It has been a never to be forgotten encounter with God in which Moses got some things off his chest, got some questions answered and his mind cleared up about the long journey that was ahead of him. I am sure that he went home from this prayer meeting revived in spirit, reassured in his mind and recommitted to his mission.

Such praying will do the same for all who "come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need." (Hebrews 4:16)

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