

**THE IMPERFECT PRAYER LIFE AND THE DESIRE FOR COMMUNION WITH GOD - Part thirteen - Sunday, January 5th 2025 - 5:30 p.m.
Pastor Don Horban, Cedarview Community Church, Newmarket, ON**

HOW MUCH DIFFERENCE DO OUR PRAYERS ACTUALLY MAKE?

Revelation 5:6-10 - “And between the throne and the four living creatures and among the elders I saw a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain, with seven horns and with seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth. [7] And he went and took the scroll from the right hand of him who was seated on the throne. [8] And when he had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each holding a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. [9] And they sang a new song, saying, “Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, [10] and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth.”

Revelation 8:2-5 - “Then I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and seven trumpets were given to them. [3] And another angel came and stood at the altar with a golden censer, and he was given much incense to offer with the prayers of all the saints on the golden altar before the throne, [4] and the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, rose before God from the hand of the angel. [5] Then the angel took the censer and filled it with fire from the altar and threw it on the earth, and there were peals of thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightning, and an earthquake.”

You've prayed for your son or daughter to be saved and they're no closer to Jesus now than when you started praying ten years ago. We prayed for healing for Irving Whitt and David Hill and they both died. You prayed for a different job and there you sit in the same old rut. You asked God to save your marriage and your husband left you.

Are we OK with this? What is going on when we pray? And what shall we do with all those wonderful promises we quote from our Bibles regarding prayer?

I know those confusing questions are not the whole story. Yes, I know God has answered many, many prayers. We've heard testimony at these very prayer meetings of dramatic, specific, undeniable answers to prayer. And we should always rejoice in those and allow them their full faith-increasing weight.

But there is something else we need to know. And these two texts from the last book in our Bibles give one more reminder for a strong, rugged, fully developed Biblical theology of the ***practice*** of and ***confidence*** in prayer. These two texts, like no others in the Bible, take us into the final chapter on why all prayer matters and all prayer counts. These are ***big picture*** texts. You can't stay strong in prayer without their full impact and weight.

1) **PRAYER IS PLEASING TO THE LORD IN A VERY SPECIAL SENSE**

Revelation 5:8 - "And when he had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each holding a harp, and **golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints.**"

Prayers are precious to God. I don't just mean in the sense that he **answers** them. That is probably what makes prayer precious to **us**. But God finds the prayers of His people precious **in themselves**. The very act of praying is like fine incense rising up before God. And they are so **valued** by God that He **keeps them**.

We will never know fully what that means. But there is no getting around the picture John sees in Revelation chapter 5. He sees the prayers of God's people in "**golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints.**"

Even a casual reading of the Old Testament reveals the dozens of commands of God regarding the people properly mixing and burning incense before the Lord. God told them He loved this fragrance. Over and over again it was said to be "**pleasing to the Lord.**"

Psalm 141:2 - "Let my prayer be counted as incense before you, and the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice!"

Don't miss this. The value of incense is the fragrance of the one **receiving it**. Incense rises to God and He loves it. God loves the aroma of the prayers of His people.

You won't always sense this as you pray in your time of need. When you pray all you may see is the need of your loved one or the shortness of your supply. But when you are on your face - in the middle of whatever it is driving you to cry out to God - never forget your prayer isn't **wasted**. Quite apart even from the **answer** to your prayer, it is never wasted. The prayer itself is precious to God.

But there's something else in these Revelation texts that's even more stunning:

2) **JOHN SEES THERE IS A DAY COMING WHEN ALL THE BOWLS OF THOSE PRAYERS WILL BE FULL**

Revelation 8:3-5 - "And another angel came and stood at the altar with a golden censer, and he was given much incense to offer with the prayers of all the saints on the golden altar before the throne, [4] and the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, rose before God from the hand of the angel. [5] Then the angel took the censer and filled it with fire from the altar and threw it on the earth, and there were peals of thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightning, and an earthquake."

Billions upon billions of prayers have been prayed. We've seen answers to some and not to others. Some have been joyful and some have been labored and empty feeling. Some have been thankful and some have been full of complaint. Our first point was all these prayers are precious to God *in themselves*.

But the question still needs to be asked, ***“What happened to all those prayers? Where do they go? What about the ones that didn't seem even to be heard? Was there any value - any point - in all those prayers?”***

You can't be a thinking Christian without having your mind “go there.” And the Bible welcomes and has a powerful answer to all those questions.

I prayed today about something and didn't **see** any result. Was that prayer just empty speech - religious pretending? Not according to our text. My prayer went into that golden bowl. But my prayer didn't **fill** it. Not yet.

But John sees a day coming. He sees a glorious day when, in this grand prophetic picture, the prayers of all the saints collectively **fills up those bowls**. No more will be prayed without those bowls spilling over and being **“thrown on to the earth”(8:5)**.

I hope you can see it. John sees a specific time - someone prays the very last prayer those bowls can hold - and the contents - all those prayers - those longings in faith - those treasured up, but not yet fully answered prayers of all God's people - will be thrown down on to the earth and will totally **reshape** everything about our world.

Remember, God will change the earth. Most of us agree this is so. But what isn't usually remembered is He will change the earth **using the collected prayers of His people.**

God will answer many of our prayers tonight. But in the bigger picture, this prayer meeting - this one right now in this church - adds weight to the collected prayers of God's people around the world and down through the centuries. **Prayer is cumulative.**

And not one of them - prayed by a small child, or aging senior, or frustrated parent, or confused student - not one of them is ever a waste of time. Every prayer - if God's Word is true - is a part of the final grand victory of God.