



Letting Your Voice Be Heard In Heaven

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President Trump, Vice-President Pence, Heads of State, Members of Congress, Speakers of Parliament, visiting clergy, my Father's children. As I listened to that beautiful rendition of "I Can Only Imagine," I found myself distracted by imagining that one day I could sing like that. The Bible says, "Thou shalt not covet" and you have caused me to transgress the law of God today. I don't get upset with people who sing well. I wish, however, they didn't make it look so easy. I want to talk about making your voice heard in heaven.

As has already been stated, our lawmakers get together each week for a prayer breakfast. One of the things that really inspires me about that prayer breakfast is the closing prayer. When they stand and join hands and they pray together. To see Republicans, Democrats and Independents praying together. I find myself asking, "Where are the C-SPAN cameras when you need them?"

One senator observed, "As some of you may have heard, it is difficult to pray like that and then leave that room and go to the upper chamber and figuratively stab one of your colleagues in the back. It's not impossible, but it is difficult."

Fewer of you may know that the next day in one of the hideaways, senators from both sides of the aisle meet for a Bible study. The Bible study begins and ends with a prayer, with both sides of the aisle praying with and for one another. Some of you may not know that every Wednesday the Chiefs of Staff get together for a Bible study that begins and ends with a prayer. Some of you may not know that every Friday more than a hundred staffers, capitol police officers, janitors, waiters and waitresses come together for a Bible study and *that* Bible study begins and ends with a prayer.

Paul had it right in Philippians 4:22, "There are saints in Caesar's household."

I am encouraged by the robust spirituality of so many who work on Capitol Hill. We have senators who are ordained ministers. We also have senators whose spirituality dwarfs my own.

An opportunity to make our voices heard in heaven

We need to come together and realize that when we pray, we are making our voices heard in heaven. I believe they gather because of that. Now we work at making our voices heard on earth. We march, we lift placards, we're involved in social media, we blog, we've got LinkedIn, and Google and Youtube, and all the ways that we try to make our voices heard on earth.

But when I see a group of people of faith of this size I get an adrenaline rush, because I know that where two or three are gathered together in God's name, He is there in the midst. So what happens when we get *this* many people gathered together in His name. I *feel* the palpable presence of God in this place. And far more important than letting our voices be heard on earth, is the opportunity to make our voices heard in heaven.

“More things are wrought by prayer than this world dreams of.”

Now, I know that there are those who say that the efficacy of prayer does not go beyond the interior life of the intercessor. Some say that prayer doesn't change anything. But I agree with Alfred Tennyson that, “More things are wrought by prayer than this world dreams of.”

There are blessings that hang on silken cords that we will never receive, except by request only.

I also believe that when we pray humanity cooperates with divinity. My friends, there are things we will never get, except by request only. There are blessings that hang on silken cords that we will never receive, except by request only. James 4:2 says, “You have not because you ask not.”

In Mark 6 Jesus went to his hometown, having already said that a prophet has honour everywhere except in his hometown. He got there and the people were skeptical. They said, “Isn't this the carpenter's son? Where did he get this wisdom and those so-called mighty works?”

One of the most startling Bible verses I know, Mark 6:6, says, “And Jesus could not do many mighty works there because of their unbelief.”

It doesn't say that he *would* not, it says that he *could* not do many mighty works because of their unbelief.

In Matthew 17 the disciples made an attempt to cast out a demon from a boy but they could not. They asked him privately, “Why couldn't we cast out the demons?” And Jesus said in Matthew 17:20, “Because of your unbelief. If you had faith the size of a mustard seed you would be able to move mountains.”

My friends, when we make our voices heard in heaven it makes a palpable difference. So, how do we do it?

Mr. President, you may be familiar with this Scripture because it was read at your inaugurations. It is so spot on: 1 Timothy 2:1-4, “‘I urge you,’ said the tent-maker from Tarsus to his protegee, ‘first of all to pray for all people. Ask God to help them.’”

We need to pray for everyone, *all* people. Whether they read the Bhagavad Gita, whether they read the Tao De Ching, whether they read the Holy Quran. We need to pray for *all* people.

“Ask God to help them, intercede on their behalf and give thanks for them. Pray this way for kings and all who are in authority so that we can live peaceful and quiet lives marked by godliness and dignity.”

1 Timothy 2:1-4 continues, “Ask God to help them, intercede on their behalf and give thanks for them. Pray this way for kings and all who are in authority so that we can live peaceful and quiet lives marked by godliness and dignity. This is good and pleases God our Saviour, who wants *everyone* to be saved and to understand the truth.”

Pray from a sense of need

For those who want to make their voices heard in heaven, how do we do it? First of all, we pray from a sense of need. I used to have about 45 seconds worth of prayer material until I became a parent. Then I had plenty of prayer material. You pray out of a sense of need. My friends, God wants us to pray when we need Him. Even as a parent wants to be with a child who needs him or her. The Bible says in Psalm 50:15, “Call upon me in the day of trouble and I will deliver you.”

In Philippians 4:6-7 the Bible says, “Have no anxiety about anything, but pray about everything with thanksgiving.”

We pray out of a sense of need. Once an international bestseller, Bruce Wilkinson’s book The Prayer of Jabez, is a wonderful story. It is based on 1 Chronicles 4:9-10 where the Bible says that Jabez prayed a powerful prayer, made his voice heard in heaven and was more honourable than his brothers. It says that his mother had named him Jabez, because she said, “I bore him with sorrow.”

Now imagine having your given name be sorrowful. Imagine being introduced, “Senator, I’d like you to meet Chaplain Sorrowful Black.”

Imagine the pushback you would get, “Ladies and gentleman, our speaker, Sorrowful Black.”

Jabez called upon the Sovereign God out of a sense of need. He said, “Oh that you would bless me indeed.”

Because every blessing is not a “blessing indeed.” In South Carolina, where my mother grew up, they used to talk about a “sho nuf blessing.” That’s a blessing indeed.

Jabez says, “I want you to enlarge my territory.”

You see you have not, because you ask not. Then he says, “I want you to keep your hand on me.”

My friends, oh to have God’s hand on us! We ought to pray that God’s hand would be on our President. I was talking with the Vice-President backstage and I said, I am praying that the hand of God will be on you.”

Ezekiel 37 says, “The hand of the Lord was upon me.”

We need people who govern to have the hand of God on them.

Jabez’ prayer continues, “I want you to keep me from evil, that it will not grieve me.”

My friends, God is no respecter of persons (Acts 10:34). If He did it for Jabez, He will do it for you and He will do it for me. So pray out of a sense of need.

Pray with a sense of intimacy

Secondly, pray with intimacy. Jesus said to His disciples in John 15:16, “I no longer call you servants, I call you my friends.”

God wants a relationship with us. In Jesus’ wonderful intercessory prayer in John 17:1 it says “He lifted his eyes to heaven and said, ‘Father! The hour has come. Glorify your Son that your Son might also glorify you, as you have given him power to give to as many as would receive him eternal life. And this is life eternal: that they might know you,’” Abba, Daddy, “and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.”

My oldest son is in the audience, and one of my pet peeves is when he calls and says, “Hello Dad, this is Barry.”

Really? I mean, I’ve got caller ID and he’s got to identify himself? If I get a call saying, “Hello darling” I should not respond saying, “Who is this?!?”

God wants an intimacy with us.

In my tradition we sing a hymn that I love, called “I Come To The Garden Alone.” It says:

*I come to the garden alone
While the dew is still on the roses*

*And the voice I hear falling on my ear
The Son of God discloses.*

*And He walks with me, and He talks with me,
And He tells me I am His own;
And the joy we share as we tarry there,
None other has ever known.*

Pray with intimacy. Pray like Hannah in 1 Samuel 1, when she wanted that baby. She prayed with such specificity and such intimacy and such fervency that Eli the priest thought she was inebriated. We need to pray with that passion and fervour.

Pray for those who govern

Finally, pray for those who govern. 1 Timothy 2:1-4 continues, “Pray this way for kings and for all who are in authority so that we so that we can live peaceful and quiet lives marked by godliness and dignity.”

We fasted and prayed for months during the presidential election. We fasted and prayed, hundreds of us, on Capitol Hill that the will of God might be done.

In Isaiah 55:8-9 God says, “My thoughts are not your thoughts, my ways are not your ways.”

Newsflash: God is smarter than we are! I know that startles some of you.

One of the most startling verses in the Bible for me is Daniel 1:1, “And God gave Jehoiakim, the King of Judah” (good guy), “delivered him into the hands of Nebuchadnezzar.”

Brother Nebuchadnezzar is the guy who tried to burn Shadrach, Michac, and Abednego alive, by heating the furnace seven times hotter than it was right now. God delivered Jehoiakim into the hands of Nebuchadnezzar.

Now Nebuchadnezzar had a dream. He couldn't remember the dream. He said, “Since you *wise* men can't remember the dream, I'll tell you what I'm going to do. I'm going to kill you and kill the members of your family and make your homes dunghills.”

Daniel and his friends stepped forward and prayed for King Nebuchadnezzar. In Jeremiah 27:6 God calls Nebuchadnezzar, “My servant.”

Proverbs 21:1 says, “The heart of the king is in God's hands and He turns it any way He desires.”

God gave Pharaoh the dream of fat cows and thin cows in order to make Egypt the breadbasket of the world. [Daniel and his friends] walked out and said to Nebuchadnezzar, "We have been praying for you. God has given us what you dreamed and the interpretation of the dream."

We must pray for those who govern and make our voices heard in heaven.

I grew up in Baltimore, Maryland. In fact, I grew up in Freddie Gray's neighbourhood. My mother had a fourth grade education, the daughter of a sharecropper. Sharecropping was an activity that Martin King called, "a new form of slavery, covered up with certain niceties of complexity."

So I grew about 30 miles from Washington D.C., but I did not shake hands with a white person until I was 16 years old. There were no white people in my church, in my neighbourhood, or in my school.

My mother motivated my siblings and I to study the Word of God. She provided us with a monetary incentive: 5 cents for every verse we memorized. So if you had entered my domicile, you would have found my siblings and I searching the Word of God for short Bible verses.

I know every short Bible verse in the book. My favourite Bible verse is not John 3:16, it is John 11:35: "Jesus wept."

Powerful verse. I love Luke 17:32: "Remember Lot's wife."

1 Thessalonians 5 is a treasure trove:

"Quench not the Spirit."

"Rejoice evermore."

"In everything give thanks."

"Despise not prophesyings."

In fact, I was doing I was doing my riff on 1 Thessalonians 5 and my mother put me on a flat rate. She said, "Hold it! I don't care how much you memorize, you're only going to get a quarter."

When it dawned on me that God sent, what John 3 calls in the Greek the *monogenēs* - the only one of its kind - His only begotten Son to die for me, no one was ever able to make me feel inferior again.

My mother knew what she was doing. One day I memorized 1 Peter 1:18-19 when I was only 10 years old. It says, "We are redeemed not with corruptible things, such as silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Jesus Christ."

Even at 10 years old, I had sufficient analytical skills to know that the value of an object is based upon the price someone is willing to pay. When it dawned on me that God sent, what John 3 calls in the Greek the *monogenēs* - the only one of its kind - His only begotten Son to die for me, no one was ever able to make me feel inferior again.

“I have got to get to know this man who died for me.”

Moreover, I said, “I have got to get to know this man who died for me.”

So now it was not just for the nickels that I started reading the Word, it was to try to find this man. And as I searched the Scriptures, it was like a Zeffirelli movie with the man with no name. I kept finding Him.

In Genesis He’s *Shiloh*.

In Exodus He is the *I AM*.

In Numbers He’s *The Star and Scepter*.

In Deuteronomy He’s *The Rock*.

In 1 Samuel He’s *The Lord of Hosts*.

In Job He is *The Redeemer*.

In the Psalms He is *The Great Shepherd*.

In Proverbs He is *The Beloved*.

I kept running into that man:

In Isaiah He’s *Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace*.

In Daniel He’s *the fourth man in the fiery furnace*.

In Micah He’s *the One who’s going forth of old* and He is *From Everlasting to Everlasting*.

In Zechariah He is *The Branch*.

In Malachi He is *The Messenger of the Covenant*.

Matthew calls Him *Saviour*.

Mark calls Him *Son of Man*.

Luke calls Him *The Great Physician*.

John calls Him *The Word Made Flesh*.

Acts says He is *the One who will mobilize us to witness*.

Philippians says, “*God has exalted Him so that at His name every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that He is Lord to the Glory of God the Father.*”

1 Thessalonians says He is *the one who will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and the trump of God*.

Jude says that, “*He is able to keep me without stumbling or slipping and present me without fault and without blemish before the presence of his glory with unspeakable ecstatic delight in triumphant joy and exultation.*”

John said, "I was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day on that Isle of Patmos in the Aegean Sea, and I saw Him *high and lifted up. He is Alpha, He is Omega, He is beginning, He is ending.*"

So because I kept meeting that man, my hope does not rest in the various branches of government: executive, legislative, or judicial. My hope does not rest in the alliances that we build. My testimony is simply this:

*My hope is built on nothing less
Than Jesus' blood and righteousness
I dare not trust the sweetest frame
But wholly lean on Jesus' name*

*On Christ the solid Rock I stand
All other ground is sinking sand*