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## What a Prayer!

2 Samuel 7:18–29

*The Eighth Sermon on Second Samuel*

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It was the English theologian, John Owen, who said that without prayer “there can be no religion at all.”<sup>1</sup> That’s how important prayer is. Without it, there simply is no religion. Our own Heidelberg Catechism describes prayer as “the chief part of thankfulness” (Q&A 116), meaning, the especial, particular part.<sup>2</sup> One hymn writer put it like this: “Prayer is the Christian’s vital breath, the Christian’s native air.”<sup>3</sup>

We turn to a passage this morning that is not just all about prayer—it is a prayer! And we see the importance here not so much because it is commanded to us, but it is exemplified in David’s life. We saw last Lord’s Day in verses 1–17 that this is one of those great passages in Scripture, opening up to us a further element in God’s redemptive plan for the world. That element is that Our of one nation, out of one tribe, and out of one family line, the Lord would set a king on Israel’s throne. David, Solomon, and all the kings were just keeping the throne warm, though, for Israel’s—for the world’s—great King, our Lord Jesus Christ. As the angel Gabriel told Mary about her son Jesus: “He will be great and will be called

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<sup>1</sup> Owen, *Works*, 4:237.

<sup>2</sup> The Latin is *praecipua*.

<sup>3</sup> From “Prayer Is the Soul’s Sincere Desire,” in *Psalter Hymnal* #434:3.

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the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end” (Luke 1:32–33).

So in verses 1–17 we hear the Lord’s words to David, and now here in verses 18–29 we hear David’s words to the Lord. It’s gospel and gratitude; promise and prayer. And note that this prayer has three parts to it: in verses 18–22 David gives thanks for the Lord’s promise to himself; in verses 23–24 David gives thanks for the Lord’s promise to Israel; and in verses 25–29 David pleads for the Lord to keep these promises. As we listen to David’s prayer I want us to learn four principles of prayer this morning:

1. *Prayer is Personal Fellowship*
2. *Prayer is Pure Humility*
3. *Prayer is Profound Awe*
4. *Prayer is Pleading Confidence*

May the Holy Spirit leads us into the truth of his Word today.

## **Prayer is Personal Fellowship**

First, *prayer is personal fellowship*. We see that in verse 18 where we read, **Then King David went in and sat before the Lord.**

He **went in**. To what? Into the tent that he constructed to house the ark (2 Sam. 6:17; 7:2). Now, if we know our Old Testaments well this tent should remind us of the tent of meeting that the Ark was housed in during the days of Moses and

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the wilderness wandering. Turn back with me to Exodus 33:7-11. We read that “Moses used to take the tent and pitch it outside the camp, far off from the camp, and he called it the tent of meeting” and that “everyone who sought the Lord would go out to the tent of meeting, which was outside the camp” (v. 7). This was before the tabernacle, which was also called the tent of meeting, was built. Then the narrative gets fascinating when we read, “Whenever Moses went out to the tent, all the people would rise up, and each would stand at his tent door, and watch Moses until *he had gone into the tent. When Moses entered the tent*, the pillar of cloud would descend and stand at the entrance of the tent” (vv. 8-9). Notice that no one else entered but Moses. And then we read: “the Lord would speak with Moses” (v. 9), and again, “Thus the Lord used to speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend” (v. 11). Moses had exclusive, personal fellowship with the Lord; so personal that it was like they spoke as friends.

Our passage also says that David **sat**. This is the first time in Scripture that we explicitly see someone sitting in the presence of God for prayer. This is why if our spiritual forefathers like Luther, Calvin, or Knox were to be here today, they’d call us irreverent in sitting for prayer. Everyone knows you kneel or stand for prayer! What does sitting communicate? It communicates rest but also sitting around in fellowship, whether at a table or just as friends. And David was doing that in the tabernacle, with the Holy God who just turned Uzzah into ash.

What does this teach us? We see David, like Moses, enjoying personal fellowship with the Lord. We see him “draw[ing] near to the throne of grace” (Heb.

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4:16). Yet, we remember that at this point in history, access like this was limited; yet, David is a picture to us of a coming day in which all God's people would be granted such access through Christ, who would satisfy the justice of God that Uzzah received, which we deserve, and tear the veil so that we can enter into the Most Holy Place.

### **Prayer is Pure Humility**

Yet, as we say, familiarity breeds contempt. How is prayer done in so much of today's evangelical churches? "God, we just want this, we just want that." The great eighteenth century English pastor and hymn writer, John Newton, once lamented this same custom in which people talked to God as if he were just a trivial conversation partner. He said, "If a man was pleading for his life, or expressing his thanks to the king for a pardon, common sense and decency would teach him a suitableness of manner...How much more, when we speak to the King of kings, should the consideration of His glory, and our own vileness, and of the important concerns we are engaged in before Him, impress us with an air of seriousness and reverence, and prevent us from speaking to Him as if He was altogether such an one as ourselves."<sup>4</sup>

The second thing we learn from David's prayer is that *prayer is pure humility*. Look again at verse 18 as David opens his prayer, saying, "**Who am I, O Lord God, and what is my house, that you have brought me thus far?**" "**Who**

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<sup>4</sup> Letter 18.

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**am I?”** Do you open your prayers like that? Remember, David has just audaciously sought to build the Holy God of the universe a house when the Lord said nothing about building a house! But the Lord has overwhelmed David in grace by saying he would build David a house instead. **“Who am I.”** Sinner. Transgressor. Wretch. Shall I continue?

**“And what is my house, that you have brought me thus far?”** David views his life from chapter 16 when he was anointed as a boy, through his high point in Saul’s house, through all the lows on the run from Saul, in all his wars, and he sees the Lord’s hand guiding him through it all: **“you have brought me thus far.”** And he is humbled to the core. Can’t we do this even more now that Jesus Christ has entered the world, and our personal world? Can’t we sing this even more now, as we look back at what we were before Christ and what he has made us in Christ? “Amazing grace! How sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me! I once was lost, but now am found, was blind, but now I see.” Can’t we sing of him as we look back at all the ups and downs, all the joys and sorrows of our lives? “Through many dangers, toils, and snares I have already come; ‘tis grace hath brought me safe thus far and grace will lead me home.”

## **Prayer is Profound Awe**

Third, and relatedly, *prayer is profound awe*. As David considers his lowliness and the Lord’s greatness in exalting David’s house instead of letting David build the Lord a house, he says, **“And yet this was a small thing in your**

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**eyes, O Lord God”** (v. 19). Children, have you ever seen someone do something so amazing that your jaw dropped or you saw, “Whoa?” That’s what David is doing here. He is awed that nothing is too big for the Lord.

Then David says something profound that has baffled commentators ever since: **“You have spoken also of your servant’s house for a great while to come, and this is instruction for mankind”** (v. 19). What David is saying, to sum it up, is that his house being established as the house of Israel’s kings is a “instruction” or a “charter for humanity.” What he is praying with awe is that from now on God would deal with humanity on the basis of a king. From now on, everything is in relation to David’s throne. This means there is a prophetic element here, in which David’s throne anticipates the day when all the nations would come and bow before the Lord’s anointed on that throne.

In awe David prays, **“And what more can David say to you? For you know your servant, O Lord God!”** David is nothing; the Lord is everything! And he has **“brought about all this greatness,”** notice, **“because of your promise, and according to your own heart”** (v. 21). Because God keeps his promises and he does so passionately from the heart, David is awed. And that awe leads to praise: **“Therefore you are great, O Lord God. For there is none like you, and there is no God besides you, according to all that we have heard with our ears”** (v. 22).

Then in verse 23 David moves from praying for what the Lord has done for him to praying for what the Lord’ has done for all Israel: **“And who is like your**

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**people Israel**” (v. 23). **“Who am I”** (v. 18); **“who is like your people Israel”** (v. 23). Before you look at verses 23–24, let me ask you this: have you ever sat at the mall, or at a restaurant, or on the beach and watched all the people go by? Of course you have. But have you ever done that and thought to yourself, “Why me? Why was I saved out of all these people?” On January 31, 1555, the English preacher John Bradford was tried and condemned to death. He wasn’t martyred until July 1, but in those five months he was imprisoned in the Tower of London. At some point as he watched others being led out to their deaths, he said, “There, but for the grace of God, goes John Bradford.”

Now look at verses 23–24 and that’s what David is so in awe about concerning Israel, **“the one nation on earth whom God went to redeem to be his people”** (v. 23) and whom **“you established for yourself your people Israel to be your people forever”** (v. 24). Be in awe in your prayers, brothers and sisters!

## **Prayer is Pleading Confidence**

Finally, *prayer is pleading confidence*. **“And now, O Lord God, confirm forever the word that you have spoken concerning your servant and concerning his house, and do as you have spoken”** (v. 25). Isn’t it interesting that prayer so often in Scripture is asking God to do what God has said he’s going to do? Contrast that with our prayers: “God give me this, God I need that.” So David goes on to recount what God has already said in verse 27 and then in verses 28–29 to ask him to keep that promise. The English theologian, Thomas Manton,

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once said that all we do in prayer is to show God his own handwriting. And when he sees his own handwriting, he cannot say no, because he cannot refuse himself.

So prayer is pleading the promises of God, but it is pleading in confidence. Notice verse 27 again: **“Therefore your servant has found courage to pray this prayer to you.”** That courage is found in God’s own faithfulness to his promises. And ultimately, this means that David is praying, albeit still in an Old Testament way, on the basis of God’s faithfulness to us in Jesus Christ. What is the promise and how has it been kept? Look at Jesus, the greater David, the king upon the throne forever.

Today, if you have Jesus Christ, you can pray in personal fellowship with your heavenly Father. Today, if you have Jesus Christ, you can pray in pure humility as you look from where he saved you and to where he has brought you. Today, if you have Jesus Christ, you can pray in profound awe at the power of God to save you from your sins, from the grip of the devil, and from hell itself. Today, if you have Jesus Christ, you can pray in pleading confidence that he will provide everything he has already said he will provide you. Do you have Jesus Christ today?

*What a prayer! Amen.*