

The Posture of the Heart

2 Samuel 7:18-29

Three preachers were discussing the best posture for prayer, while a telephone repairman eavesdropped nearby. “Kneeling is definitely best,” claimed one. “No,” another contended. “I get the best results standing with my hands outstretched to Heaven.” “You’re both wrong,” the third insisted. “The most effective prayer position is lying prostrate, face down on the floor.”

The repairman could contain himself no longer. “Fellas,” he interrupted, “the best praying’ I ever did was hanging upside down by my heels from a telephone pole.”

So, what is the best posture for prayer?

¹⁸Then King David went in and sat before the LORD...

It was interesting to read how different biblical scholars reacted to the idea that David “sat before the LORD,” not so much because the meaning of the word is obscure, because it’s not, but because the idea of sitting for prayer is largely foreign in the Bible. We read of kneeling, bowing, standing with raised hands, falling prostrate on the ground. We don’t think twice about sitting for prayer ourselves, but sitting sounds a bit too cozy for the most pious of biblical characters.

Some commentators prefer to render the verse “David tarried before the LORD” even though the word means “sat.” Some old rabbis endorsed the plain sense of the word, but added that sitting must have become, at some point, a special prerogative for kings. What point would that have been? David was only Israel’s second king. It seems to me that the various postures of prayer in the Bible might just reflect the unique occasions, passions and natures of those prayers.

While we cannot be dogmatic about prayer postures, that is not to say that in our own prayer lives we should not give more attention to the place and posture of prayer than we do. In his article, “Getting Serious when You Pray,” Woodrow Kroll paints an all-too-familiar picture:

A woman is in her car, listening to radio, trying to pray: “Dear God, As I go to the store this morning, please bless ...” “Eh, I don’t like that song [changes station]. Please bless my family, my husband, help me, too.” [forecast being announced] “I already know the forecast [changes station]. “Help me to live the way you want me to, and ...” [radio reports a six-car pileup]. “Oh, that’s right on my way. Maybe I’ll take a different route. Now where was I? Oh yeah. Amen.”

If there is a way to better posture ourselves to reflect our sense of the holy, our brokenness, our joy or whatever other attitude of the heart applies in a given prayer, it may prove rewarding to explore the matter. But, on this occasion, “David sat before the LORD.”

Don’t picture David on a throne or lounging in a big Lazy-Boy. That he “sat before the LORD” indicates that he left his elegant palace and went to the tent that he had erected to house the Ark of the Covenant. There, he likely sat on the ground in an outer court. After all, that is what had brought this particular prayer to pass. David wanted to build a temple to the LORD, but God said, “It’s not going to be YOU that builds ME a house. I will build YOU a house, a dynasty. Your son will build my temple. His sons will rule a kingdom that will endure forever.” In the short-run, this prophecy was fulfilled by Solomon. In the long-run, it is King Jesus Who still reigns.

Sitting is a perfectly good posture for trying to process the amazing goodness of God, which seems to be what David was doing. David may have sat for a long time before uttering a word. To us, the prayer seems eloquent. That is because English translators worked long and hard to make it so. The original Hebrew is a mess. It reads like we might expect the spontaneous prayer of an emotionally overwhelmed person to read – broken phrases, choking back gasps and tears.

While some speculation must accompany the physical posture and location of this prayer, what God cared most about was David's heart. It is no different with you. Pick a favorite prayer posture. Sit before God. Stand. Kneel. Lift your hands. Bow your head. Of first importance is a heart that recognizes the bigness of God and the littleness of you in terms of goodness, purpose, power, importance, significance and sufficiency. The Creator loves the creature. Before you utter a word, it may be of value just to sit in silent stillness and take that in. Let's see what we can learn from this prayer of David about the prayer posture not of the body, but of the heart.

I. A Heart Broken by the Grace of God (18–21)

*"Who am I, O Sovereign LORD, and what is my family, that you have brought me this far?
19And as if this were not enough in your sight, O Sovereign LORD, you have also spoken about the future of the house of your servant. Is this your usual way of dealing with man, O Sovereign LORD?"*

20"What more can David say to you? For you know your servant, O Sovereign LORD. 21For the sake of your word and according to your will, you have done this great thing and made it known to your servant."

A. David's Life Has Been One Unmerited Gift after the Next

An old preacher once said, "The proud heart is never a thankful heart." Seven times in this prayer, David prays, "O Sovereign LORD." If God is sovereign, it only follows that ten times David refers to himself as "your servant." David acknowledges how undeserving he is to stand in the place God has assigned him. He was a shepherd before he was a king. Though his predecessor sought to kill him, God preserved David's life time and again. Finally, God placed David on the throne. He gave him Jerusalem as a capital and established him in a regal palace. Somehow, that wasn't enough. God now was promising to make a dynasty out of David's line.

I think we have established that David was not a perfect man. But, at least to this point in his reign, he knew his place. He never forgot that he ruled only by the good favor of God. Saul had become proud. He thought that he could hold onto his power even after the Lord rejected him. David did not suffer from such delusions of grandeur. Verse 20 seems to affirm his near sense of speechlessness that I suggested earlier when he prayed, "What more can David say to you?"

B. All Real Prayer Begins with a Proper Grasp of the Parties

When Jesus taught His disciples to pray, He told them to begin "Our Father in heaven. Hallowed be your Name" (Matthew 6:9). When we approach God, we must treat Him as a holy being. There is nothing about Him that we can take for granted, even though His kindnesses to us are beyond numbering. In fact, it is impossible for us to fully appreciate God's gifts to us if we are not sensitive to the chasm that He has to bridge every day just to be our Provider. Charles Chapman wrote: "Nothing tends more to developing humility than a survey of the wonderful love of God." We do not deserve mercies that are new every morning, but God gives them freely.

So, God has not promised to produce a line of kings through your kids. Still, each of us has a reason to pause and to be rendered speechless. Perhaps, a habit worthy of development is that of sitting still and silent in God's presence and simply wondering, "Why?" Why did He provide us salvation in Jesus Christ? Why is He so patient with us when we are so slow to conform to the righteousness into which He calls us? Why does His heart tenderly reach out to us when we are hurting? Why does He provide for our physical needs? Why does He use feeble folk like us as He pursues His purposes in the world? Why does He give us promises touching eternity? Any of us rightly can ask, "Who am I O Sovereign LORD ... that you have brought me this far?"

II. A Heart Blessed by the Goodness of God (22-24)

²²"How great you are, O Sovereign LORD! There is no one like you, and there is no God but you, as we have heard with our own ears. ²³And who is like your people Israel - the one nation on earth that God went out to redeem as a people for himself, and to make a name for himself, and to perform great and awesome wonders by driving out nations and their gods from before your people, whom you redeemed from Egypt? ²⁴You have established your people Israel as your very own forever, and you, O LORD, have become their God.

A. What Is a King without a Nation?

Anyone can recognize God's greatness in the vastness of His creation, but it is the man after God's heart who recognizes that His greatness is most evident in His goodness. David saw his kingship not simply as a personal perk, but as a meaningful role in the unfolding of God's purposes in the world through a nation. From his vantage point, David could only recognize Israel as a nation led by a king, but ideally, ruled by the Law of God. We have seen the prophecy of Nathan unfold. We recognize the link between "spiritual Israel" and the church. David sees three specific purposes for Israel's calling. We see these same purposes present in the kingdom of Christ.

1) God wanted to redeem a people for Himself. David was looking back to the time when His people were slaves in Egypt. God raised-up a deliverer in Moses. The last of ten plagues that finally convinced the Pharaoh of Egypt to release the Israelites was the death of every firstborn son. In the home of the Israelites, however, the blood of a sacrificed lamb marking the doorframe of the home rescued the family in that house from that particular terror. God's slayer passed over that home. Today, we recognize that this was a picture of the work of Jesus, Who is our Passover Lamb. We live because He died in our place and took our sins to the cross, rescuing us from God's wrath.

2) God desired to make a name for Himself. More often than not, Israel missed the divine agenda behind her special calling. She was not favored capriciously, but purposefully. God intended for Israel to shine as a light, reflecting His true nature to the surrounding nations.

¹Sing to the LORD a new song; sing to the LORD, all the earth.

²Sing to the LORD, praise his name; proclaim his salvation day after day.

³Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous deeds among all peoples.

⁴For great is the LORD and most worthy of praise; he is to be feared above all gods. - Psalm 96:1-4

That calling was clarified and refined when Jesus taught His disciples, "You are the light of the world." We understand that through silent witness and through vocal proclamation, we are to declare that the kingdom of God has come to man in the life, ministry and reign of Jesus Christ.

3) God desired to perform great and awesome wonders. David equates these wonders with the purging of Israel's enemies from the Land of Promise. No nation of giants and no idol of wood or stone could prevail against the armies of *JEHOVAH* at first. Of course, a time came when the faith of the people wavered and they ceased to be diligent in defeating their enemies.

That may ring a troublesome bell. We want to believe that no giant in our lives and no idol that vies for our attention are stronger than the Lord at our side. Still, in spite of our faith, we cannot defeat the enemy. It may be an area of impulse control. It may be a bad habit. Let me ask you something. Are you using due diligence? I'm not talking about your private, secretive willpower. Are you prayerful? Are you in the Word? Are you in accountable relationships with believers?

B. Real Prayer Recognizes One's Place in God's Community

I used to hear it said quite often in evangelism presentations that if I was the only person on earth, Jesus would have still died on the cross just for me. That was a sweet sentiment that does wonders for my self-image, but it's easy to speculate about something that was never a part of the divine plan in the first place. Too many people already view Christianity through narcissistic eyes – as though they really are the only person on earth. That is not how David viewed his relationship with God or his role as king. That is not how we are to view our walk in Christ.

Devout godliness is not simply delighting over our own favored condition, the fact that we were snatched from the flame so to speak. Neither is it tending only to our own spiritual development. We are members of the nation of God. By and large, we serve God by serving one another. By and large, we grow up in our faith by relying on one another in community. By and large, our joy is not private. We delight in the fact that a multitude that no one can number name Jesus, "Lord."

III. A Heart Burdened with the Glory of God (25-29)

²⁵"And now, LORD God, keep forever the promise you have made concerning your servant and his house. Do as you promised, ²⁶so that your name will be great forever. Then men will say, 'The LORD Almighty is God over Israel!' And the house of your servant David will be established before you.

²⁷"O LORD Almighty, God of Israel, you have revealed this to your servant, saying, 'I will build a house for you.' So your servant has found courage to offer you this prayer. ²⁸O Sovereign LORD, you are God! Your words are trustworthy, and you have promised these good things to your servant. ²⁹Now be pleased to bless the house of your servant, that it may continue forever in your sight; for you, O Sovereign LORD, have spoken, and with your blessing the house of your servant will be blessed forever."

A. David Recognizes that His Own Legacy Is Not the End of the Matter

David recognizes the greatness of *JEHOVAH*. He recognizes that *JEHOVAH* has crowned him as king. He recognizes that the end result of all this is to establish a never-ending kingdom that will bring glory to the name of *JEHOVAH*. Under ordinary circumstance, being made a king might fill a man with pride. However, this more complete picture that David had produced exactly the opposite result. It humbled him. David was a means to an end that was much bigger than him.

God is not a means to our ends, but how often do we attempt to reduce Him to such by only turning to Him when we are in the throes of some great crisis and need His help? God will not answer the prayer of the student who turned in his test and prayed, "O God, please let Paris be the capital of England!" The fact that He has not gifted us in a certain way becomes our rationale for not lending a hand when it is needed. The fact that He is patient with us in our weaknesses becomes our excuse for not battling those weaknesses. In many churches, people expect God to show up to meet their needs. They measure worship by whether or not it gave them a spiritual buzz. In the meantime, they recoil at the notion that God makes great demands of them.

David has just received a personal promise of immense proportion, but he does not want to view the blessing apart from its repercussions on the greater glory of God. Would that we might learn to pray for personal blessings only as they might result in God's name being glorified.

B. Real Prayer Always Surrenders to God's Purposes

David prays back to God precisely what God has promised. Why? Doesn't the promise make the prayer unnecessary? I have a 3 ½ year-old granddaughter. Sometimes, I announce that we must go to the bank. My bank only has green and blue suckers, reflecting the colors in their logo, I suppose. When I promise to get her a "blue sucker" in keeping with her request, do you really think that she doesn't ask again - and again and again? A promise does not negate prayer. It heightens the anticipation.

Nor, should it. Remember, this whole scene was precipitated when God said, "No!" to David's dream of building a temple. David is praying, "Let your purposes, not mine, take effect." Of course, those plans include a dynasty. David now has the courage to pray for something he would never have had the audacity to have prayed for had God not made His will known.

When we pray for what God has already promised, we are essentially praying, "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." Obviously, God will have His way whether we pray or not. Our prayers for God's will ally our lives and our energies with His purposes. David was essentially committing himself to be the kind of king that God wanted Him to be so that he would be in harmony with God's divine purposes rather than detrimental to them.

To pray for God's will to be done is not to ask Him to uncover some great mystery. It is to surrender and to avail ourselves to God's will, so that He might use us as He sees fit.