

DAILY BIBLE READINGS - Week of April 15, 2018

THEME: "Jesus: Our Mediator" WORK OF INTERCESSION

Sunday Read Hebrews 7:22-28

"He is able to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them." Among the countless blessings we enjoy as followers of Jesus is the joy of knowing that He is at the right hand of God interceding for us. To have the prayers of other believers is a valuable asset, but even greater is to know that Jesus is interceding right there at His throne in heaven. Ought that not to be a motivating factor for us to keep our lives pure so Jesus, who loves us dearly, does not have to be embarrassed when He is pleading our case for His Heavenly Father to bless our lives? How much better that He can reference us by our obvious efforts to be doing the will of God! We know that the prayers of Jesus on our behalf will be that God will open and close doors to keep us in tune with the plans of God for our lives. When on earth, Jesus was all about doing His Father's will for the glory of the kingdom of heaven. Surely, He wants the same for us each and every day. What a comfort that is when we meet with disappointment when things don't go exactly the way we wanted. Jesus has our backs, and will be interceding in such a way that God will use all things for good to bring us into conformity with the image of Himself as He promised in Romans 8:28-29. And Jesus can totally empathize with us because He was here on earth and was tempted and tried in every way we are. That is what we are told in Hebrews 4:15. That adds to the intensity of His work of intercession for us. He went through it all, probably a lot worse than any of us! He understands what we are facing! He's been there, no matter what. And it all worked out for the glory of God, just like we want for us!

DISCIPLINE OF PRAYER

Monday Read Luke 6:11-12

"And it came to pass in those days, that He went out into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God." While He was on earth, it was a high priority for Jesus to be engaged in prayer. The four Gospels record many accounts of Jesus meeting with His Father in heaven, such as the one in today's Bible reading. It is interesting that they seem to be right before Jesus faced critical decisions, such as this one where it is followed by Jesus' choice of the twelve disciples. Before that important decision, Jesus talked it over with His Father in heaven. Not a bad idea for us when we must make a decision regarding the people with whom we must serve in trying to do the will of God during our time on His earth. Another memorable prayer of Jesus is the one in Luke 22 where we read of His prayer in Gethsemane just before His arrest and crucifixion. He had invited three of His disciples to go along with Him for their support in what He knew would be the most difficult thing for Him after coming to earth. He had them tarry behind so He could be alone with His Father. After pouring out His soul during which time He mentioned His hope for a different way, He ended up saying that which should always be our desire: *"Not my will, but thine be done."* That prayer gave Him the courage to move on!

RESULTS OF PRAYER

Tuesday Read James 5:15-17

"The effectual, fervent prayers of a righteous man availeth much." The Bible is full of instances of the truth of this statement. He made reference to the Elijah's prayers in the early days of Israel. Who could ever forget the time that Elijah called upon God to bring fire to the offering on the altar after the prophets of Baal had miserably failed in their efforts in calling upon their god. Then, as James pointed out, Elijah called upon God to bring rain after a three year drought, and the rain came pouring down. How about God responding to Abraham's prayers on behalf of his nephew Lot when God indicated He was going to destroy Sodom where Lot was living because of the rampant immorality. Five times he had prayed for God to spare the city if there were fifty righteous in the city, then 45, then 40, then 30, then 20, and finally 10. That is where Abraham stopped, probably relieved that God promised not to destroy the city if there were ten righteous in the city. One problem: there was only Lot's family in the whole city: his wife and daughters and their husbands. That fell short! But God answered Abraham's prayer! The angels told Lot to get out of the city with his family. The sons-in-law

scoffed and stayed, but his wife and daughters went with him. God then sent fire and brimstone to destroy Sodom. God answered Abraham's prayer, not the way Abraham expected, but God provided a way to safety. God answers prayer!

PRAYER EFFECT IN HEAVEN

Wednesday..... Read Revelation 8:3-4

"Another angel came and stood at the altar, having a golden censer; and there was given unto him much incense, that he should offer it with the prayers of all saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne. And the smoke of the incense, which came with the prayers of the saints, ascended up before God out of the angel's hand." Can you imagine this effect that our prayers have on the atmosphere in heaven! Here on earth, we use candles or spray to freshen up the atmosphere of the rooms in our house. Well, what those things do for our homes, our prayers do in heaven, just as the offerings in the Old Testament were said to bring a sweet aroma for God to enjoy. We read about one of those instances in Genesis 8:20-21 just after the flood when Noah was engaged in the worship of God: *"And Noah builded an altar unto the Lord, and took of every clean beast, and of every clean fowl, and offered burnt offerings on the altar. And the Lord smelled a sweet savor..."* The prayers of the saints bring that same sweet savor to the Lord. Our prayers not only are of great benefit in accomplishing the will of God on earth, they have an effect on the atmosphere in heaven. That is almost too good to be true, but that is the power of prayer!

LESSON ON PRAYER

Thursday Read Luke 11:1-4

"And it came to pass, that, as He was praying in a certain place, when He ceased, one of His disciples said unto Him, Lord, teach us to pray." When the disciples saw the power of Jesus' prayers, they felt compelled to ask Him to teach them to pray, and Jesus did just that. We have that model prayer in this account in Luke 11 and in Matthew 6. Notice it begins with an exaltation and adoration of God with an appreciation for His position and perfection. That acknowledgment of His person is followed by a desire to see His program and purposes accomplished: His kingdom on earth. Then the prayer turns to a plea for God's provision, pardon, and protection with the closing being an acknowledgment of God's preeminence. I think it worthy of note that Jesus taught us to pray by advising us to address God as *"Our Father."* Surely, it is not improper to make reference to God the way our founders did in the Declaration of Independence: Ruler of Nature, Almighty Creator, Supreme Judge of the world. They are most accurate and fitting. But God's desire is to speak to Him as a loving, caring Father of a family of believers, joint-heirs with His Son. The emphasis is on the family relationship. We know from John 1:12-13 that true believers who have received Christ into their hearts and lives are the children of God because the decision to receive Christ is what Jesus, in John 3:3-7, called being *"born again."* That makes an individual a child in the family of God!

FREQUENCY OF PRAYER

Friday Read I Thessalonians 5:16-25

"Pray without ceasing. In everything give thanks, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you." God is available to His children anytime and all the time. We should feel comfortable to call upon God without hesitation for anything and at any time. Our Heavenly Father is honored when we pray. He is hurt if we think we are bothering Him. We are to feel free, and He is not offended. Think of Abraham coming to God six times with that one request! Abraham was nervous about bothering God, but God was apparently impressed with his persistence. And God answered Abraham's prayer; not the way Abraham expected, but God heard and responded by sparing Lot and his family. Abraham had asked that God spare the city, but God knew his concern was the family. God did that: in a different way, but He did it! Let us remember when we pray that lesson in Isaiah 55:9, where we are told this by God: *"For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts."* God will respond, as we ask or even better! His ways are perfect; by faith, we must accept them!

HINDRANCES TO PRAYER

Saturday Read Psalm 66:18-20

"If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me. But verily God hath heard me: He hath attended to the voice of my prayer. Blessed be God, who hath not turned away my prayer, nor His mercy from me." We must realize that there are things that hinder prayers, such as unconfessed sin.

God is holy, and we must come to Him on the merits of the shed blood of Jesus and in the name of our Savior! Ignoring Biblical truth turns God off to prayer. We read about that in Proverbs 28:9: *"He that turns away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be abomination."* Sometimes God answers with a "no" because we are asking for something that would actually be against His will and would not serve us well. We know that from James 4:3: *"Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts."* Realizing that, it is good to close our prayers as Jesus did: *"Not my will, but thine be done."*