

Fil-Am Community Church

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Key Verse: Revelations 8:1-5

### **“Prayer that Unleashes God’s Will”**

John Franklin recounts a time back in June of 1990 when he joined about 250 people to participate in a two-week evangelistic crusade in Mombasa, Kenya, which at the time had around a million people. They were divided into teams of three, each team going hut-to-hut and house-to-house, presenting the Gospel. And John Franklin said he was in awe. "A few times in my life I have been in a service or prayer meeting where the manifest presence of God could be felt but never before in a whole city. Wherever we walked, the presence of the Lord tangibly permeated the land, so much so that often people were saved by the dozens."

Franklin goes on to tell one example when his team of three was walking down a dirt road that led to the next village. Up ahead were three Kenyan men seated on stools by the roadside. "As we approached," he said, "one of them arose, walked briskly toward us, and greeted us in English.

"'Excuse me, are you from America?' he asked. 'Yes.'" "'Are you one of the ones who has come here to tell us the word of God?' 'Yes,' I answered. 'We've heard that you've come, and we've heard of Jesus and His great power. Tell me, how does one become His follower? My friends and I want to know.'" John explained the plan of salvation, and without a trace of hesitation, the man immediately replied, "*Let's pray.*"

John Franklin thought what I would have thought: "That was too easy. He must not have understood." So he repeated it again. But the man interrupted. "I understood the first time. Let's pray!" That story of people coming to them to be saved happened over and over. In all, 30,000 people responded to the Gospel in 14 days time.

It was an extraordinary 14 days for Franklin and the team. But there's a back-story he adds that speaks to our purpose this morning.

Three months earlier, several churches in Mombasa began fervently praying for these concentrated days of evangelism. During the two weeks of the crusade, a different church prayed all night each night. John Franklin joined one of the all night prayer meetings, praying until 7am when he went to bed. He woke up four hours later and felt the presence of God in his hotel room so strongly that he did not rise; he simply slid out of the sheets to his knees in prayer. That day following that prayer meeting, John said every single adult they witnessed to trusted Christ. No one rejected the Gospel. Franklin and the others in the crusade made a big discovery in that crusade:

The revival that came to this city happened because of the prayer meetings of God's people.

I will tell you that God has sovereignty ordained the corporate praying of His people, such that His mighty workings increase exponentially and His purposes are accelerated when we pray together.

If you survey the New Testament you would find a pattern of high priority when it comes to praying together.

One writer, after studying the New Testament pattern of prayer wrote, "The Early Church didn't have a prayer meeting. The Early Church was the prayer meeting.

In fact, in the Early Church, every Christian was a prayer-meeting Christian."

If you look back or glance at history you will find the same priority.

"No great spiritual awakening has begun anywhere in the world apart from united prayer."

So today I am challenging each of you who are believers in this place to hear from the Spirit of the Lord in this matter.

What we need here at Fil-Am is a need, a renewal of prayer in our church, among those who lead and serve in the various ministry areas in the church, as well as those who presently aren't involved beyond simple attendance. In other words, all the leaders, all the followers, all of those who haven't made up their mind if they are leading or following... (All of You)

OK, as we say here, let's get into the Word of God; more importantly let's get the Word of God into YOU.

To get you ready for this, I would like you to look at Revelation 8, an utterly astonishing passage of Scripture that hurls us to the closing days of history.

John, the writer of Revelation, tells us of the things that must take place. And in the midst of earth-shattering events, there is this amazing pause in heaven, and a lesson about prayer that is so staggering that if it weren't in Scripture, I wouldn't believe it. Let's look together at what John describes:

Revelations 8:1-5,

*1 When He opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour.*

*2 Then I saw the seven angels who stand in the presence of God; seven trumpets were given to them.*

*3 Another angel, with a gold incense burner, came and stood at the altar. He was given a large amount of incense to offer with the prayers of all the saints on the gold altar in front of the throne.*

*4 The smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, went up in the presence of God from the angel's hand.*

*5 The angel took the incense burner, filled it with fire from the altar, and hurled it to the earth; there were thunders, rumblings, lightnings, and an earthquake.*

There is an amazing connection here between the prayers of the saints and the end of the time.

The gathered prayers of God's people are portrayed here as the instrument God uses to bring this world to its appointed consummation.

Let's break this down carefully so we can fully grasp the enormous importance of praying together, of corporate prayer. There are three major movements in this part of the apocalyptic drama of the last days.

The first movement is...

### **Movement #1: The seven-sealed scroll**

Verse 1 opens with a reference to the opening of the seventh seal of a scroll: When He opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour.

To understand what the seventh seal is all about, we need to go way back to the beginning of Chapter 5.

Revelations 5: 1-4, the Chapter opens with these words:

*1 Then I saw in the right hand of the One seated on the throne a scroll with writing on the inside and on the back, sealed with seven seals.*

*2 I also saw a mighty angel proclaiming in a loud voice, "Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?"*

*3 But no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll or even to look in it.*

*4 And I cried and cried because no one was found worthy to open the scroll or even to look in it.*

The enormous significance of the contents of this scroll is such that no one in heaven could open it..

Not the six-winged cherubim that continually declare God's glory;

Not the Angel Gabriel, God's special messenger;

Not even the mighty archangel Michael, God's heavenly warlord--was strong enough or rightly qualified to open the scroll.

What was this thing in the right hand of God that caused the high and holy in heaven to shrink back when it came time to serve?

John knew the contents of that scroll. We're told in Chapter 4 that John had been brought up into heaven "in the Spirit" and promised that he would see "what must take place after this"-that is, after the Church Age is over.

John had the unparalleled opportunity to see how it will all end, how the final years of world history will play out, when all that God had promised will come to be.

Which means that the scroll, sealed seven times to insure its secrecy, was the unfolding of human history.

It's very opening would enact the final chapter for this world and those who live in it.

It was like a living map for THE finale, when all things would be brought to their consummation under the purposes of God.

It is like watching the finale of a huge fireworks show...

That scroll must be opened, and God had purposed that someone other than Himself administrate the end of time.

But when the call went out-Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?--no one stepped forward.

God has ordained that someone other than Himself administrate the end of days.

Verse 3 suggests that this invitation extended to every known realm of existence, seeking anyone who would take up the great scroll. And the search produced no one. John begins to weep loudly, thinking that his hope of seeing the end of history would be denied.

What John doesn't understand is that this delay is intentional.

In Revelations Chapter 5 verse 5 one of the elders around the throne informs Him that that crying is really not the right reaction in this moment. "Stop crying. Look! The Lion from the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has been victorious so that He may open the scroll and its seven seals."

This elder was inferring to John that there was a deliberate and calculated pause that establishes without any doubt the unmatched merit of Christ.

In fact, as our Lord walks to the throne to take the scroll from His Father's hand, the Bible says in verse 8-10,

*8 the 24 elders that surround the throne, each holding a harp and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints, fall down before him.*

*9 And they sang a new song: You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals; because you were slaughtered, and you redeemed [people] for God by Your blood from every tribe and language and people and nation.*

*10 You made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they will reign on the earth.*

Jesus alone has the royal right to open the seals of history and oversee its final unfolding, because Jesus died, and in dying He ransomed a great

multitude of saints from all the nations, and He has made them priests and established them as rulers of the earth.

Saints please don't miss this: **the cross is the key** to history. What happened there, nearly 2000 years ago will unlock the future revelation of God's plan.

The one who will ride forth with a sword and rule the nations with a rod of iron has the right to do that because once He was a slain Lamb.

God is willing to give the judgment of history only into the hands of one who came to save.

Chapter 6 records what happens as Jesus cracks open the seals of the scroll of destiny, one-by-one. The actions of Christ in heaven bring blows against the earth the likes of which have never been seen.

Each opened seal creates global cataclysm. One quarter of the earth's population will perish under the judgment of God (6:8). And with each successive seal that is broken by Christ in heaven, humanity is brought one frightening step closer to the end of time and the brink of eternity.

### **The 100 year prayer meeting;**

In 1722 Count Nicholas Ludwig Von Zinzendorf, troubled by the suffering of Christian exiles from Bohemia allowed them to establish a community on his estate in Germany.

The center became known as "Herrnhut" meaning "Under the Lords watch", it grew quickly and so did its appreciation for the power of prayer!

On August 17<sup>th</sup> 1727, 24 men and 24 women decided to spend an hour each and every day in scheduled prayer. The difference was they didn't say at 3 PM we will par but set up a schedule so there was one continuous praying chain 24 hours around the clock.

Soon others saw what they were doing and joined them, more signed on and then more, and more continued to sign on.

Days passed, months passed and they kept the prayer chain going, unceasing prayers rose to God 24 hours a day, as someone was engaged in prayer at all times.

They began to receive letters from friend and people from distant places asking them to pray for their needs. A decade passed and the praying continued, non-stop, then another decade it was a prayer meeting that lasted one hundred years.

Undoubtedly this prayer chain helped birth protestant missions. It was no more than six months into it when suggestions were coming in saying if they sent missionaries out, they could reach more for Christ in West Indies, Greenland, Turkey as well as all over the globe.

Twenty four missionaries stepped up and departed the next day.

By the time that William Carey became the “Father of modern missions” over three hundred missionaries had been deployed from that small group of 24 men and 24 women that decided to intercede in prayer.

They sparked great conversions like John and Charles Wesley and indirectly ignited the “Great Awakening” that swept through Europe and America sweeping thousands into the kingdom.

The prayer meeting that lasted 100 years, however, the results will last for eternity.

## **Movement #2: The silence in Heaven**

In 8:1, the Lamb, Jesus, breaks the last remaining closure to the scroll. Once this scroll is opened, the wheels of God's judgment will speed up, preparing the way for the Second Coming of Christ to earth and the end.

But before that occurs, something strange takes place. When He opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour.

The next sound that we hear is in v. 5 when the angel of God takes the fire of the altar and throws it to the earth with "thunders, rumblings, lightning's, and an earthquake."

My sense of this text tells me that as Christ opens the seventh seal, the hosts of heaven stand in dread awe--dumb-struck with what is about to happen with the opening of the scroll.

The raw sovereign power of God is about to be released in ways that will cause the cosmos to convulse and everything to change forever. So the inhabitants of heaven share a stunned silence.

But something more is here in this moment. Jesus deliberately pauses to show John and us the gathered power our prayers have and the effect they create in history.

Do our prayers really matter? Does praying together truly accelerate the fulfillment of God's purposes?

The answer is utterly astounding.

Leon Morris said this about this passage: "The saints [of God] appear insignificant to men at large. But in the sight of God they matter.

Even great cosmic cataclysms are held back on their account. And the praises of the angels give way to silence so that the saints may be heard."

In other words, in this silence after the opening of the seventh seal we have a dramatic presentation of the importance of the prayers of the saints. Before the scroll is opened God wants to make clear to John and to us that the unfolding of the end of the world will happen by the prayers of the saints. This brings us now to the final movement:

### **Movement #3: The supplication of the saints**

A day hemmed in prayer is less likely to come unraveled.

Look at verse 3: Another angel, with a gold incense burner, came and stood at the altar. He was given a large amount of incense to offer with the prayers of all the saints on the gold altar in front of the throne.

Notice: it is the prayers of "all the saints" that have been piling up on the altar. If you wonder where your prayers go and what God does with them, here is one of the answers. They go onto an altar before His throne.

If you're thinking "Aw c'mon, how could millions and millions of prayers accumulate like that at God's throne?" I would just remind you that if mere human beings can invent a microchip that holds countless millions of bytes of communication, it is not difficult to imagine that God has no trouble devising a way to preserve every prayer that has ever been prayed in the name of Jesus.

They fragrance His throne room with worship, says v. 4. But there will come a day when God will do something else with our prayers. Verse 5: The angel took the incense burner, filled it with fire from the altar, and hurled it to the earth; there were thunders, rumblings, lightnings, and an earthquake.

These cataclysmic reactions-the thunder and loud rumblings and flashes of lightning and an earthquake simply represent the action of God from heaven on the world as the scroll of the end of the age begins to open and the seven trumpets and the seven bowls are poured out. But don't miss the quiet point in all the fury: our prayers bring that about.

Ethel Barrymore said, when life knocks you to your knees, well that's the best position in which to pray, isn't it?

Charles Spurgeon said, "*Praying will make you leave off sinning, or sinning will make you leave off praying.*"

President Abraham Lincoln once said, *“I have been driven to my knees many times by the overwhelming conviction that I had nowhere else to go.”*

## **How do I pray or why do I pray?**

I will discuss how to pray a little later on but the question why do I pray, I ask this question time and time again, especially when God’s presence seems far away from me.

I have asked it when reading theology books wondering, what use there may be in repeating what God must surely know?

Does prayer really matter? When doubt creeps in I can just remind myself that Jesus, the Son of God, who spoke the universe into existence, and sustains all that exists, found compelling need to pray.

Jesus prayed as if it made a difference, as if the time he devoted to prayer mattered, every bit as much as the time devoted for caring for people.

Jesus clung to prayer as a lifeline, for it gave him both the guidance and the energy to know and do the father’s will.

Remember Jesus who possessed way above us the wisdom of the father and still felt a strong need to flood the heavens with prayers.

For me prayer has become more than a shopping list of request to present to God, it has become a realignment of everything.

I pray to get a better perspective, to gain a glimpse of the world, through the eyes of God.

What Rev. 8 shows us is that the prayers of the saints are the instrument God uses to usher in the end of the world. Our prayers change history in more ways perhaps than we recognized.

Not one God-exalting prayer has ever been in vain. What God wants us to believe about our God-exalting prayers is that none of them is lost. None is wasted or pointless. Not one is lost or forgotten. Not one has been pointless.

All our prayers accumulate at God's throne in heaven until they reach their proper proportion, and then He acts, in accordance with His will, to bless or to judge or to heal or to save or any of a number of His perfect acts.

Prayer is seen on two levels. It is seen on an individual level. If you've ever wondered what happens to your prayers, here's the answer.

The millions upon millions of prayers over the last 2000 years gather at His feet, as the saints have cried out again and again, in many forms: "Thy kingdom come; Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." It is also seen on a corporate level.

There is a critical mass that comes when God's people combine their prayers together before God.

And the flame has been growing brighter and brighter and more and more pleasing in the presence of God. And the time will come when God will command his holy angel to take his mighty censer and fill it with fire from the altar where the prayers burn before the Lord, and pour it out on the world to bring all God's great and holy purposes to completion.

Listen to what Thomas Torrance wrote about this passage:

*"The fire comes from the very altar on which the prayers of the saints have been offered. This surely means that the prayers of God's people play a necessary part in ushering in the judgments of God. "*

What are the real master-powers behind the world and what are the deeper secrets of our destiny?

Here is the astonishing answer: the prayers of the saints and the fire of God. That means that more potent, more powerful than all the dark and mighty powers let loose in the world, more powerful than anything else, is the power of prayer set ablaze by the fire of God and cast upon the earth."

So here's the bottom line for us about prayer:

We cannot pray enough. Our prayers are stored up on the altar of God and made the power for great divine interventions in history. Who knows what has been wrought by prayer!

Jesus makes it plain in Luke 18:1, "*We ought to always pray and not to lose heart.*"

Philippines 4:6, "*Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.*"

Concerted prayer is uniquely appointed by God in the accomplishing of His mighty works. What I hope you see is that God has sovereignty ordained the corporate praying of a church, such that His mighty workings increase exponentially and His purposes are accelerated when we pray together.

The main purpose of prayer is not to make life easier, nor to gain magical powers, but to know God in a more real way.

The Lord's Prayer from the Book "Prayer" by Philip Yancey

Jesus taught his disciples to pray the Lord's Prayer, we have all followed along and many have memorized it but let's take the time this morning to slow it down and reflect on each phrase, and even add your own personal applications.

**Our Father Who Art in Heaven:**

Begin with an enduring term of relationship, "Father."

Remind me today that you live and reign, not in heaven only but all around me and in my life.

Make me aware of your active presence all day, in all my undertakings and in the people I meet.

**Hallowed be your Name:**

How can I recognize you? In the splendor of nature, in the odd mix of people I meet, in the still voice that calls me to be more like you?

May I "Hallow" what lies before me, by consciously referring it to you, and also honor your perfection, your holiness, by seeking to become more like you.

**Your Kingdom Come:**

Your kingdom come, and allow me to be an agent of that kingdom by bringing peace to the anxious, grace to the needy, and your love to whom all I touch.

May people believe in your love and goodness, because of how I live today!

**Your Will be Done on Earth as it is in Heaven:**

I see that will most clearly in Jesus, who healed the sick and comforted the grieving, who lifted up the downtrodden, who stood always for life and not death, for hope and not despair, for freedom and not bondage.

He lived out heaven's will on earth; help me be more like Jesus!

**Give us Today our Daily Bread:**

We have no guarantee of a day beyond this one, May I trust you for what I need today, nourish for both my body and soul, and not worry about my future needs and wants.

May I also be ever responsive to those who lack bread today.

**Forgive us our Debts, as we also Forgive our Debtors:**

Remind me of my true state, as a debtor who can never buy my way into your favor. Thank God I do not have to.

Grant me the same attitude of forgiving grace towards those who owe me, and have wronged me, that you show toward me.

**And Lead us not into Temptation, but Deliver us from the Evil one:**

Let me not slide mindlessly toward evil today. Make me alert to its temptations and strong to resist it, with neither fear nor regret.

Saints if you don't listen to anything, please pay attention to the next few things I am going to tell you;

Prayer does not change God, but changes him who prays!

The real value of persistent prayer is not so much that we get what we want, as we become the person we should be!

**I need God more than I need anything I might get from God!**

With that said let us pray....