

The Effectual Revival Prayer of Moses

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Have you ever made a careful, systematic study of all the prayers in the Bible and of all the teaching on prayer that the Scriptures contain? Such a labour has the potential of dramatic, powerful personal good. I am in the process of just such a study. I began my labour by quickly going through the entire Bible and marking every passage pertaining to prayer. (While I would not urge my method upon you, it simply consisted of putting a red line down the right margin of every prayer passage.) This in itself was of very great usefulness in demonstrating to me afresh what a vital part of the heart of God the prayers of His people are. Now I have the delightful prospect before me of meditating on each of these marked passages and allowing my own heart and life to be shaped accordingly.

Obviously, while only a portion of the prayer passages bear on the theme of revival, I cannot in the space of one brief article even begin to deal with all of these. Let me then endeavour to draw your mind and heart into only one of these prayers that appears in four segments, the prayer pertaining to the revival under Moses found in Exodus thirty-two to thirty-four.

The setting is disturbingly familiar. Moses was on the mountain with God. Down below, the murmuring people assembled about Aaron saying, "Come, make us a god who will go before us; as for this Moses, the man who brought us up from the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him" (Ex 32:1). Hopefully, you have on former occasions already felt the horrifying shock of realizing that Aaron missed the chance of a lifetime in failing to call these wayward people to repentance. Instead, he wickedly commanded them to tear off their gold and to bring it to him, and out of their ornaments he fashioned a golden calf of which the people brazenly said, "This is your god, O Israel, who brought you up from the land of Egypt" (Ex 32:4). Aaron then proceeded to build an altar before this wretched idol and they gave the next day to sacrificing, eating and drinking, and playing before their abomination (Ex 32:5-6).

The penetrating words of God to Moses in threatened final judgement against these vile people need to be noted: "I have seen this people, and behold, they are an obstinate people. Now then let Me alone, that My anger may burn against them, and that I may destroy them; and I will make of you a great nation" (Ex 32:9-10).

1. Bold Entreaty Based on God's Reputation. It is precisely here that we come to the first part of a remarkable prayer, for instead of stepping aside, Moses stands boldly before the LORD entreating and saying, "Why doth Thine anger burn against Thy people whom Thou hast brought out from the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand?" (Ex 32:11). Remember, God and Moses are on the mountain, and whereas God is also on the plain and fully aware of the wretched sin of His people, Moses, not having seen what God sees, has no means whereby to feel what God is feeling; yet, in the midst of his ignorance, Moses utters the first segment of one of the wisest and most effectual prayers on record.

Have you wondered how to pray for revival? Take a lesson from the words that follow, "Why should the Egyptians speak, saying, 'With evil intent He brought them out to kill them in the mountains and to destroy them from the face of the earth'? Turn from Thy burning anger and change Thy mind about doing harm to Thy people. Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, Thy servants to whom Thou didst swear by Thyself, and didst say to them, 'I will multiply your descendants as the stars of the heaven, and all this land of which I have spoken I will give to your descendants, and they shall

inherit it forever" (Ex 32:12-13). Who would dare to ask God to spare the nations of today because of the plenitude of righteousness in them or because of some good they have done? Surely, if God destroyed the entire earth at this very moment, none could accuse Him of any lack of justice. But Moses' entreaty is based not on just desserts but on the fame and reputation of God Himself.

Is it unreasonable, following the lead of Moses, to plead with God for America asking, "O God will you not spare this land? You yourself raised up its peoples out of a howling wilderness. You graced us with Your presence, power, and protection. You enabled us to become one of the mighty nations on earth. Our founding fathers desired to establish a nation whose God is the LORD, and in official documents and even on coinage they declared our trust in Thee and proclaimed us 'one nation under God.' The peoples of the world have known at least something of our Christian heritage and early commitments to You. What will the heathen say if You now destroy us? Will they not ask, 'What kind of a God is this who pours so much of Himself into a people, only to destroy them two hundred years later?'" And cannot those of you in the United Kingdom and in numerous other lands of the earth entreat the LORD, reminding Him of His bountiful mercies in seasons past, and plead with Him that, having already invested so much of Himself in your land, will He not do so once again for the glory of His great name?

Was God offended by Moses' line of reasoning? Hardly! "So the LORD changed His mind about the harm which He said He would do to His people" (Ex 32:14).

All who know this passage realize that as soon as Moses saw with his own eyes what God had already seen, feeling something of the anger and the anguish of God, he smashed the tables of stone and ordered the deaths of three thousand of the participants in this great evil.

2. Self-Sacrificing Intercession for God's People. On the following day Moses turned to the people saying, "You yourselves have committed a great sin; and now I am going up to the LORD, perhaps I can make atonement for your sin" (Ex 32:30). The next part of this remarkable prayer is immediately apparent as Moses returned to the LORD (Ex 32:31-32) and said, "Alas, this people has committed a great sin, and they have made a god of gold for themselves. But now, if Thou wilt forgive their sin and if not..." Do you recognize the significance of the long dash preceding the "if not" phrase? Can you imagine any godly man or woman carelessly praying such a prayer "...and if not, please blot me out from Thy book which Thou has written!" The pause was urgently necessary! No one asks God to "please" blot me out of the book which You have written without giving most serious consideration to such an offered price.

Can you imagine yourself, so burdened for your own people that you would happily forfeit your own eternal salvation if God will not save them? Does it not remind you of the prayer of another faithful servant of the LORD, a New Testament apostle who declared, "For I could wish that I myself were accursed, separated from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh, who are Israelites..." (Rom 9:3-4). Is it not evident that prayer for revival must be passionate, indeed so passionate that no cost is too great if God Himself should demand it!

But God did not demand this blotting out of Moses. Indeed, His word was, "Whoever has sinned against Me, I will blot Him out of My book" (Ex 32:33).

Then the LORD, having waived His threatened final judgement against all the people, proceeded to impose a remedial judgement in which He refused to go before the people, as had been His practice. He offered instead to send an angel before them, plainly declaring that because of their

obstinate ways or the stiffness of their necks He would not go with them lest He destroy them on the way (Ex 32:34-33:3).

3. Relentless Pleading for God's Presence. The next part of Moses' prayer begins with an extraordinary action. The tent was pitched outside the camp and called "the tent of meeting." Everyone who sought the LORD was required to go out to the tent of meeting to do so (Ex 33:7). Then Moses said to the LORD, "See, Thou dost say to me, 'Bring up this people ! ' But Thou Thyself hast not let me know whom Thou wilt send with me. Moreover, Thou hast said, 'I have known you by name, and you have also found favour in My sight.' Now therefore, I pray Thee, if I have found favour in Thy sight, let me know Thy ways, that I may know Thee, so that I may find favour in Thy sight. Consider too that this nation is Thy people" (Ex 33:12-13).

When God graciously asserts, "My presence shall go with you, and I will give you rest," Moses immediately responds, "If Thy presence does not go with us, do not lead us up from here. For how then can it be known that I have found favour in Thy sight, I and Thy people? Is it not by Thy going with us, so that we, I and Thy people, may be distinguished from all the other people who are upon the face of the earth?" (Ex 32:14-16). Oh, the depth and the power of such reasoning with God.

Why is it that billions of the world's present-day people do not believe in Christianity? Surely, for multitudes of them, it is because they do not believe in Christians. And why do they not believe in Christians? Because the distinguishing mark of Christianity is absent The manifest presence of God in the midst of His people! Don't try to argue that God is with us as He has always been. If He were we would be a holy people as He is a holy God. The sheer fact that our morality is the morality of the world is overwhelming evidence of God having withdrawn His manifest presence from us.

Instead of pretending all is well, how much wiser to reason as Moses reasoned and to plead with God saying, "If You do not go with us we are not going anywhere! The only way the world can distinguish us from themselves is when Your presence is manifested among us. When we tell them that You are our God and we are Your people they do not believe us for they cannot see evidence of Your Presence with us. They believe we are just like themselves for the distinguishing mark of your people is lacking among us. We beseech you therefore our God that you will return to us in manifest presence and power."

And how does God respond this time? "I will also do this thing of which you have spoken; for you have found favour in My sight, and I have known you by name" (Ex 33:17).

4. Passionate Desire to See God's Glory. Having gained so much, is Moses now content? No! Recognizing that he is on praying ground and that God is both hearing and answering he raises yet another petition: "I pray Thee, show me Thy glory!" (Ex 33:18).

Then God, in the magnificence of His mercy, invited Moses back to the mountain, where standing him in the cleft of a rock and covering him with His hand, the LORD God Omnipotent caused all His glory to pass before him (Ex 33:19-34:7). "And Moses made haste to bow low toward the earth and worship. And he said, 'If now I have found favour in Thy sight, O LORD, I pray, let the LORD go along in our midst, even though the people are so obstinate; and do Thou pardon our iniquity and our sin, and take us as Thine own possession'" (Ex 34:8-9). Does God respond to this final segment of Moses' prayer? Read for yourself the covenant that God offered beginning at verse ten (Ex 34:10).

Oh, to pray as Moses prayed! Oh, to travail as Moses travailed! Oh, to be effectual in prayer as Moses was effectual! Surely, this is our duty! Amazingly, this is our privilege!

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