

## “WHEN KINGS PRAY”

There is no nobler sight than a king on his knees in prayer. Not that his prayer is of necessity more powerful or efficacious than a child’s prayer, or a janitor’s prayer, or a laundry woman’s prayer. But when a king kneels in prayer, he is acknowledging a Higher Power. He is admitting his need of Divine Help. Only he who is helpless can truly pray.

When kings pray, demons tremble. A man is powerful on his knees. A king can become super powerful on his knees. For only when we have knelt before God can we stand before men. Prayer, said James Montgomery, moves the arm which moves the world, and brings salvation down. The king’s heart is in the hands of the Lord, but when that king volunteers that heart to God in full surrender, watch out! The Arm that moves the world will bring salvation down!

Who can forget that poignant picture of our first president, George Washington, on his knees in prayer in the deep snow at Valley Forge.

And who can forget the words of the Great Emancipator, Abraham Lincoln, when he admitted, “I have been driven many times to my knees by the overwhelming conviction that I had *nowhere else to go*. My own wisdom, and that of all about me, seemed *insufficient for the day*.”

During the dark days of the Civil War, an overnight guest at the White House, Mr. Murdock, happened upon an unforgettable sight. “*One night, it was just after the battle of Bull Run, (4,000 casualties) I was restless and could not sleep. I was repeating the part which I was to take in a public performance. The hour was past midnight. Indeed, it was coming near dawn, when I heard low tones proceeding from a private room near where the President slept. The door was partly open. I instinctively walked in, and there I saw a sight which I shall never forget. It was the President, Mr. Lincoln, kneeling beside an open Bible. The light was turned low in the room. His back was toward me. For a moment I was silent, as I stood looking in wonder and amazement. Then he cried out in tones so pleading and sorrowful: ‘O thou God that heard Solomon in the night when he prayed for wisdom, hear me: I cannot lead this people, I cannot guide the affairs of this nation without Thy help. I am poor and weak and sinful. O God, who didst hear Solomon when he cried for wisdom, hear me, and save this nation!’*”

And who will forget that the first official act of our 43<sup>rd</sup> president, George W. Bush, after his inauguration, was to declare the following Sunday, Jan. 21, as a National Day of Prayer and Thanksgiving.

And we will never forget that on Sept. 11, 2001, yet another dark day that will “live in infamy,” President Bush addressed the nation from the White House, saying, “Today, our nation saw evil . . . Tonight, I ask for your prayers . . . And I pray that (all those who grieve) will be comforted by a power greater than any of us, spoken through the ages in Psalm 23: ‘Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil for You are with me.’ . . . God bless America.”

How thankful all of us should be for a praying president in these tumultuous times. How refreshing to have a leader who prays to God instead of one who preys on women. I am told that President Bush reads the Bible and prays every day. That comforts me because he who does not pray when the sun shines will not know how to pray when the clouds roll. I believe he knows that a man without prayer is like a tree without roots. I believe he understands what Tennyson said, “More things are wrought by prayer than this world dreams of.”

My wife said she was never so proud of a president as when President Bush called for a National Day of Prayer and Remembrance on Sept. 14, which he participated in at Washington’s National Cathedral, and when he addressed the nation from a special joint session of Congress on Sept. 20. *Newsweek’s* Howard Fineman reported that before Bush spoke to the nation, he chose to pray. More than two dozen ministers were invited to the Roosevelt Room in the White House where chairs had been arranged in a circle, “prayer-meeting style.” No one presumed to sit next to the President. Bush took a seat, gestured with his hands, and said, “Move here next to me. I feel lonely.” They joined hands in the circle and prayed with the President. Little wonder, then, that he rose to the occasion and rallied the nation with a Churchillian-like speech.

Our nation has been knocked to its knees. Now we are in a proper position to pray! The former director of the FBI, J. Edgar Hoover, said, “The spectacle of a nation praying on its knees is more awe-inspiring than the explosion of an atomic bomb.” John Bunyan said, “Prayer is a shield to the soul, a sacrifice to God, and a scourge to Satan.” Satan trembles when he sees the weakest Christian on his knees. What must he feel when he sees a king on his knees?

The Old Testament records a number of times when kings prayed.

David, the man after God's own heart, when told he could not build a house for God, prayed, "Who am I, O Lord God? And what is my house, that You have brought me this far? . . . You are great, O Lord God. For there is none like You . . . And who is like Your people, like Israel, the one nation on the earth whom God went to redeem for Himself as a people . . . Now, O Lord God, You are God and Your words are true . . . Now therefore, let it please You to bless the house of Your servant, that it may continue before You forever . . ." (2 Sam. 7:18-29). The Psalms are filled with his prayers, too numerous to mention here. Psalm 51 is the most famous, David's prayer of repentance. He did not evade the issue, parse words or torture the language. He came right out and prayed, "Have mercy upon me, O God, according to Your lovingkindness; according to Your tender mercies, blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin" (Psa. 51:1-2).

Solomon, who described himself as "a little child who could not come in and out," could have prayed for riches and honor, but instead he prayed: "Give to Your servant an understanding heart to judge Your people, that I may discern between good and evil. For who is able to judge this great people of Yours?" (1 Kings 3:9). And the Bible says the prayer pleased the Lord. It is good for kings to pray. It is better when the prayer pleases the Lord!

Solomon's prayer of dedication for the temple – one of the longest recorded prayers in the Bible -- ( 1 Kings 8 & 2 Chron. 6) cannot be overlooked. Just one verse: Kneeling before the altar with his hands outstretched to heaven (what a picture!), he prayed, "And may You hear the supplication of Your servant and of Your people Israel, when they pray toward this place. Hear in heaven Your dwelling place; *and when You hear, forgive*" (v. 30).

Jehoshaphat jumped at the opportunity to be a praying king. Faced by a great invading army, Jehoshaphat stood his ground. You never stand so tall as when you kneel to pray. His prayer still rings with passion: "O Lord God of our fathers, are You not God in heaven, and do You not rule over all the kingdoms of the nations, and in Your hand is there not power and might, so that no one is able to withstand you? . . . O our God, will you not judge them? *For we have no power against this great multitude that is coming against us; nor do we know what to do, but our eyes are upon You*" (2 Chron. 20:6,12). The Bible says that all Judah, with their little ones, their wives, and their children, stood before the Lord. The Spirit of the Lord came upon Jahaziel who came up with an ingenious plan: Praise the Lord but don't pass the ammunition! The next day they went out singing and the was the last dance for the enemy, who were completely routed.

Hezekiah is certainly a candidate for the praying kings' Hall of Fame. His prayers are documented in 2 Kings 20, 2 Chron. 32, and Isa. 37 & 38. When Sennacherib king of Assyria sent a message threatening the holy city of Jerusalem, Hezekiah went to the house of the Lord, spread the message before the Lord, and prayed, "O Lord our God, save us from his hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that You are the Lord, You alone" (Isa. 37:20). The angel of the Lord, Jehovah's favorite "cruise missile," descended upon the Assyrian army and killed 185,000 troops in one night. Sennacherib retreated to Nineveh, to the temple of Nisroch his god, where he took one between the ribs, summarily struck down by his own sons.

These are but four kings who prayed. Let us move from the Old Testament to the New, where we find a fifth and final king on His knees in prayer. John 17, the Holy of Holies of the N.T., contains the longest recorded prayer of Jesus Christ, King of kings, and Lord of lords. In Westminster Abbey in London, among the tombs of kings and queens, a small notice is posted on one of the massive columns. It reads, "Prayers for Christian unity in this chapel every Tuesday at 2 P.M." But here is the King of all kings praying for Christian unity in the very shadow of the Cross.

Jesus was a man of prayer. In "the days of His flesh" He offered up prayers with strong cries. He spent entire nights in prayer. He prayed often. He felt the need of prayer. He loved to pray. Jesus prayed at His baptism, on the Mount of Transfiguration, at the grave of Lazarus, in the garden of Gethsemane, on the Cross of Calvary, even as He was ascending into Heaven, where He ever lives to intercede for those who come to God through Him. No one has ever believed in or practiced more the ministry of individual or intercessory prayer. And He was the Son of God! How much more, do you and I, the "small 's'" sons of God, need to follow the example of Jesus?

When Jesus prayed, He was just 12 hours from the Cross. How would you pray if you knew you had only 12 hours to live? For what would you pray? For whom would you pray?

Jesus lifted up His eyes to heaven and said, "Father, the hour has come." Islam has 99 different names for Allah – not one of them remotely resembles the intimate term "Father" (which appears 100 times in John alone). The prayer grows in intensity. "Holy Father" (v. 11). Only time in Scripture. The "Holy Father" does not reside in the Vatican. He lives farther north than that! A lot farther. "O righ-

teous Father!” (v. 25). Only a holy, righteous father could answer this particular prayer.

In verses 1-5 He prayed for Himself to be glorified . . . but only that the Son might glorify the Father. This he did, magnanimously and magnificently, 12 hours later when His hour truly came and He died on the Cross as a willing, loving, atoning, vicarious, substitutionary, sin-defeating, salvation-bringing sacrifice for the sins of the world.

In verses 6-19 He prayed for His disciples to be sanctified . . . so that they would be set apart for the work and ministry of preaching and teaching Christ to the world. The sanctifying agent would be the truth, the saving, and empowering Word of God. Anticipating Pilate’s skeptical question “What is truth?” in the next chapter, Jesus clearly states, “Thy Word is truth.” It is what would sanctify the disciples. It is what sanctifies us today. Absolutes are not obsolete. The believer is set apart, literally, from the world, and for the world, by the Word of God, which lives and abides forever.

Finally, in verses 20-26 Jesus prays for all believers to be unified. You are breathing the purified and rarified air of the Holy of Holies when you dare to read verses 20 & 21: *“I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me.”*

At last we have come to the heart of the prayer. It pulsates with power and passion. It throbs with energy even as Jesus’ heart must have throbbed the night John leaned on His breast and heard the very heartbeat of God. It almost sobs for the salvation of souls.

Jesus’ prayer is a GENEROUS prayer. *“I do not pray for these alone.”* It was not limited or restricted to His disciples. In John 10:16 He said, *“And other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring and they shall hear My voice; and there will be one flock and one shepherd.”* Jesus did NOT pray with His inner circle, *“Us four and no more.”* We need to enlarge our prayer territory as Jesus did.

Jesus’ prayer was an OPTIMISTIC prayer. *“But also for those who will believe.”* Jesus was an optimist. Note the positive expectancy of this request. He had faith in the future. They WILL believe.

Jesus' prayer was an EXCLUSIVE prayer. "For those who will believe IN ME." John 14, "You believe in God, believe also in Me." Why? "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me" (14:6). I'm sorry, but all faiths are not alike. One faith is not as good as another. Peter said, "Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). My faith is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness. I dare not trust the sweetest frame, but wholly lean on Jesus' name. On Christ, the solid Rock, I stand – all other ground is sinking sand."

Jesus' prayer was a VALIDATED prayer. "For those who will believe in Me THROUGH THEIR WORD." The teachings of the apostles validated the claims of Christ. Jesus said, "I have given to them the words which You have given Me" (v. 8). The apostles' doctrine is not about themselves, but is about Christ! What God's Word says about Jesus, through the apostles, is the final word. Don DeWalt once told me he was going to write a book and call it, "Agree with me or go to Hell!" But then he said he realized that Someone had already written the Book! It is not ours to rewrite the letter . . . it is ours to deliver the mail.

Jesus' prayer was an INCLUSIVE prayer. "That they all may be one." Red and yellow, black and white, they are precious in His sight. In Christ the walls have come down. In Christ there is ONE body. "By one Spirit were we all baptized into one body" (1 Cor. 12:13). In the first century there was not a Jewish church and a Gentile church, a Slave church and a Free church, a Male church and a Female church, a Scythian church and a Barbarian church. Doremus Hayes said, "Masters and slaves sat side by side at the table of their common Lord as brethren beloved. Patrician ladies from the royal court and plebian prostitutes from the public streets worshiped together as sisters saved. Roman freedmen, Greek philosophers, Jewish tradesmen, Scythians, barbarians met in the assembly on such a plane of equality as the world had never deemed within the range of possibility . . . here was a marvel indeed!"

Jesus prayed for the unity of all believers. Our task is to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. Our forefathers said, "In essentials (matters of faith, things primary), unity; in non-essentials ( matters of opinion, things secondary), liberty; in all things, charity." Two boys were sitting on a curb in front of a church. One said, "And to what abomination do you belong?" Thomas Campbell said, "Division among Christians is a horrid evil . . . it is anti-Christian, as it destroys the visible unity of the body of Christ, as if He were divided against Himself, excluding and excommunicating a part of Himself." Walter Stram said, "Divi-

sion in the church is treason against Christ, and it presents a tragic stumblingblock to the non-Christian.”

Barton W. Stone said, “I blush for my brethren, who hold up the Bible as the bond of union yet make their own opinions of it tests of fellowship.” We will never unite on opinions. Paul said, “Whatever you believe about these things keep between yourselves and God” (Rom. 14:22). No more food fights between the Ministers of Meat and the Broccoli Brothers!

Jesus’ prayer was a MODELED prayer. “As You, Father, are in Me, and I in YOU . . .” One in name, nature, aim. My father and I share the same name, nature, aim. But here the analogy breaks down. Because we are human. Dad liked “Silent Night.” But my brother and I liked 3-Dog Night. Dad preached that Jeremiah was a prophet but we knew he was a bullfrog. But we stayed together singing “Joy to the World” even to the fishes in the deep blue sea, why? Because we were family.

We had our differences around the table. Mom had a rule, “Clean up your plate or no dessert!” Always fixed diced beets the night we had cherry pie. I would rather try to eat a pair of dice than eat diced beets. But I learned to beat the system with Wonder bread.

Family vacation in Rambler station wagon.

Finally, Jesus’ prayer was a WORLD prayer. “That the world may believe that You sent Me . . . that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me” (vs. 21,23). 17 times in John 17. The world at its worst needs the church at its best. “By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:35). Brother DeWelt and Brother O. L. Mankamyer. “Let’s go bury the body of our Lord.” We need to bury our differences in the back yard of the church! Religious contention is the devil’s harvest!

When Joseph sent his brothers back to Canaan with the message that he was alive, his last words to them were: “Don’t quarrel on the way!” Jesus has sent us into all the world with the message that He is alive. “Don’t quarrel on the way!” It is the prayer request of a King!

On Sept. 11, Thomas E. Burnett, a 1992 graduate of Pepperdine University, boarded United Airlines Flight 93 at ???. He was headed home to San Ramon, Calif. After the plane was hijacked, Burnett called his wife, Deena, on his cell phone. By this time several passengers had learned the fate of the other hijacked planes

that had been flown into the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. Burnett told his wife, "I know we're all going to die. There's three of us who are going to do something about it." Burnett and two other traveling companions, total strangers, Mark Bingham and Jeremy Glick, evidently banded together, overcame their captors, and brought the plane down in the quiet countryside of Pennsylvania. Deena later said, "I know without a doubt that the plane was bound for some landmark (probably the Capitol or even the White House, VK) and that they saved many, many more lives than were lost on that plane."

Men, we're all going to die. But there's something we can do before then. We can band together and pray. If total strangers can come together in a crisis and save lives surely we can come together as a band of brothers in prayer and work together to save lost souls who have been hijacked by Satan and are headed for hell.

Quit quarreling. Come together. Stay together. Pray together. Work together. Honor the prayer of a King!