



## **THE PRIVILEGE OF PRAYER – Psalm 5; Hebrews 10:11-12, 18-22**

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Prayer – it is a regular part of our times together and our personal lives if we are God’s people. It feels strange to start a meeting or a meal without stopping to pray. If we hear of someone going through a rough time, our first reaction is often to let them know that we will be praying for them. As we read the Bible, we come across many prayers – the whole book of Psalms is devoted to many different types of prayers. If you are like me, prayer is some much a part of your life that you rarely stop and think about it.

Prayer is one of the greatest privilege’s we have as God’s children. As His children, we can come into His presence freely and without hesitation. We can talk to our Father and know that He listens and is willing and able to act for our good. We identify with David in Psalm 5 when he says: *“I bring my requests and wait expectantly” (v. 3b).*

But can anyone come with this assurance? David goes on to say: *“O God you take no pleasure in wickedness; you cannot tolerate the sins of the wicked. Therefore, the proud may not stand in your presence, for you hate all who do evil.” (v. 4,5)* We read this and immediately react – He’s not talking about us! We are not wicked, proud, evil, are we? However, Paul says:

*No one is righteous—not even one. No one is truly wise; no one is seeking God. All have turned away; all have become useless. No one does good, not a single one. For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God’s glorious standard. (Romans 3:10-12,23)*

Are we just fooling ourselves if we think we can come into God’s presence and seek His grace and mercy? Are we right to wait expectantly for God to respond to our requests?

It is this question which our passage from Hebrews addresses. When God chose the Israelites to be His people, He knew that they were not perfect. He knew that they would turn their back on Him and His holiness and proudly go their own way. Even those who tried to follow Him would sometimes do the wrong things and sin against one another and against Him. Therefore, God set up a system of sacrifices. Every day, His priests stood before the altar and offered sacrifices for sin committed by His people. These sacrifices provided some measure of cleansing so that people like David could come before God even though he sinned – and we are learning in our study of David that he was not perfect! But because of this regular cleansing he could pray to God and know God would hear him. But he could not go into God’s very presence, even the king had to stay outside the temple. Only those consecrated to God, the priests could go into the temple and only the High Priest could go into the Most Holy Place when God’s presence was visible in the cloud of glory. And he could

only go there once a year, on the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16). Then he would go into the Most Holy Place after offering sacrifice for his own sin and the sins of the people, and after going through a ritual of sprinkling the blood and washing himself to signify his recognition of sin and need for God's forgiveness. It was God's grace which allowed this cleansing and approach to Himself even though it was not complete or permanent. The minute the High Priest walked out of the temple, he was once again a normal sinful individual.

But this was never meant to be the final answer. It was just a picture to point us to the final answer and prepare us for it. Through Jesus Christ, God provided the final solution to the barrier our sin places between us and God. As we read, He *"offered himself to God as a single sacrifice for sins, good for all time ... and when sins have been forgiven, there is no need to offer any more sacrifices ... and we can boldly enter heaven's Most Holy Place because of the blood of Jesus."* (Hebrews 10: 12,18) If we accept God's salvation in Christ and place our trust in His sacrifice for us, we can *"go right into the presence of God with sincere hearts fully trusting Him"*. (v. 22) For we have been cleansed by the blood of Christ and the washing of regeneration.

Now, we can say with David, *"Because of your unfailing love, I can enter your house; I will worship at your temple with deepest awe"* (v. 7) We don't have to stand outside but we can enter right in, even to the Most Holy Place, and bring our praise and requests to Him. Like David, we can pray for guidance and protection and for His justice to triumph over the brokenness and evil which sin brings. (v. 8-10) God Himself becomes our refuge and our joy. Because we have been forgiven and cleansed of our sins and been given Christ's righteousness, we can approach God with confidence, *"For you bless the godly, O Lord; you surround them with your shield of love"* (v.12)

Today we want to spend some time praying together - to thank God for His love for us which causes Him to save us and care for us and to bring to Him the things that are on our minds. We can only do this with confidence because of His great love for us.