

Revelation 5, focusing on v. 8
Prayer is...
November 13, 2016

Main Point: The highly symbolic nature of apocalyptic literature found in the book of Revelation is meant to encourage God's people. It's not meant to scare us, intimidate us, or confuse us. This passage gives us a glimpse of the throne in Heaven. It shows us the effectiveness of our prayers so that we will be motivated to pray.

SI:

Focusing on v. 8, but read whole chapter
Rev. hard to read b/c of so much judgement and highly symbolic language.
Have to explain the scroll and the seals.
Who are the four living creatures? Who are the elders?

Intro: Sunday after the national elections.

No matter who was elected, many Christians would say it is the imminent decline of America. But even if it is, Christians from the time of Revelation would shout forward to us: Yes, the church is constantly under attack. Sometimes more, sometimes less.

Yet, God is on His throne. Persecution and Trials will come, but God reigns and rules from on High, and His kingdom is ever expanding and growing. What may in the short run look like decline is opportunity for our eyes to be opened to God's kingdom.

This happened to me while I was pastoring in M'ville:
been there a couple of years... difficult things, no growth, stagnation, seemingly in decline, economy tanked, 300 employee plywood mill closed, people lethargic, no babies in the nursery. Lord, what is going on, and why did You bring me here?

"I brought you here to lead you to pray." Where will you go? What will you do? Organize fine fried chicken dinners? Work on a fancy new sign out front? Stir up some excitement by being the man about town, the pied piper, the hero has arrived?

And so God led me to pray like I never had before. It wasn't wailing, it wasn't hours upon hours, it was an attitude, a heart level way of praying. And God says it is sweet incense before His throne.

And He answered: He brought a family with young kids to the front door of the church on a Tuesday morning.

And for you individually and for our church together, my hope is that God uses this passage to lead us to see what a privilege prayer is and to engage more deeply in God-honoring prayer.

1Prayer is response , release, and costly.

v. 8 and 9 > ties together prayer and worship. The elders are holding two things, harps - singing; bowls of prayers.

This is a picture of corporate worship, corporate prayer.
Look at what it is! > What is on display is Christ's qualifications to open the seals so that the scroll can be read — the scroll written on back and front, symbolizing its completeness that all of God's plans have been made and written down.

The scroll is symbolic of the judgements to come upon the unbelieving world. The seals represent the witnesses to the scroll's contents. Jesus alone is qualified to open the scroll, and when He does, the four living creatures (creation) and the 24 elders (the OT and NT church) fall down and worship

Prayer is standing ovation — spontaneous response to seeing or experiencing something amazing, unusual, wonderful, take your breath away.

This should encourage us both in our prayer and our worship. Look what singing is: Singing is prayers put to music. Crying out praises to the One who is Worthy.

The Lamb standing, the resurrected sacrificial Lamb is alone worthy, worship

Corporate response - we're in this together... not just about your own personal prayer life, but to do so in community, to enter into the throne room, not just as the **after dinner mint**. We stir each other up to pray when we do it together.

Prayer is worship, it is response to who God is, to what Christ has done in His atoning sacrifice for our sin. Christ has purchased access to God the Father for us.

Prayer is response in that it is response to who God is as revealed in Scripture. We pray in response to God's truth. We pray His Word, His truth.

Prayer is response, prayer is **release**: b/c it is response to the world as it is. (trans to 2

2 Prayer is release

Look what is done to incense to make it incense:

fragrant smelling herbs, resins.

How do they get the smell out of them?

Take a **grinder** and pulverize the ingredients into powder form. Think of a pepper corn in a pepper grinder. Friction, pressure, cutting little blades.

Then burn them with fire.

Crush the ingredients, then burn them.

Then, and only then, can the ingredients give off their fragrant aroma.

Prayer is release > it is a release of energy — I don't mean some kind of spiritualist new age energy, I mean look at what happens to the incense. I don't have the expertise to explain the chemical reactions, but it is a release of chemical energy, a release of heat

and light, fragrance and smoke> When you are suffering, you have all this pent up desire for it to be over, and this pent up energy of emotions of sorrow, anger, longing.

And in the context of Revelation – The Church is suffering persecution from without and within, it is hurting, and the Church is longing for justice, longing for relief.

Some of you have been through this, some of you are going through it now. What is God doing in your life? Why are you going through this? Why is this so hard? What possible good could He be working out of this?

Could He be leading you to cry out to Him, to go to Him, to see Him, to seek Him like you never thought you could or would need to?

Could He be leading you to pray like you never have?

See? Do you see the kindness of God in this? This image of the golden bowls of incense - immensely valuable, before His throne, overwhelming the throne room of Heaven - see this image? This is God saying to us that He knows what our prayers are, He knows how intense they are, He knows what we go through in order to get to these prayers.

This is way above religious, obligatory prayer - this is nothing like that. It's not praying the right way in order to get something from God. It is an offering, a sacrifice, it is the release of pent up emotion and longing and desire for God to be God and for Him to hear you and answer. And the fact that these two things, the harps and the golden bowls of incense are before His throne is proof that He hears and answers.

And more: Ex 30:34-35 “The LORD said to Moses, “Take sweet spices...with pure frankincense...and make an incense blended by the perfumer...You shall beat some of it very small and put part of it before the testimony in the tent of meeting where I shall meet with you. It shall be most holy for you.”

Some of you feel like you are being beaten up by God. It is not for punishment. It is for the release of what He is placing in You: holiness, closeness to Him, intimacy with Him.

Some of you wince at this, turn away from this. But where else will you go? He will lead you to holiness, and that holiness comes through the crushing of you, of the Self, of your pride, of your expectations for the way your life should have gone.

look how incense starts **small**, very small, after the crushing, grinding, pulverizing...but it eventually, as it burns, overwhelms the room so that it is unavoidable. And smell, it has the power to change the mood, this is why fragrant candles are so popular. Your prayers are sweet smelling to God, blessing Him, giving Him joy in His people and their cries to Him for relief and help.

Some of you think you are small. Or think your problems are small and insignificant. Some of you think you are wasting God's time or your own time. Some of you think when we gather corporately to pray that our prayers are a waste of time.

Not so. This verse blows that away. Your prayers are overwhelming the throne of God, they are unavoidable. Heaven will be like walking into the biggest and best fragrance store imaginable without any of the headache inducing fake strawberry soufflé truffle cake smells.

Prayer is release **of** energy, and prayer is release **from**:

Prayer is Release from control. I can't do this, Lord, I don't know what is going on, Lord. Ah yes, now we are getting somewhere. I don't like to admit how proud I am, how capable I like to look or be, how often I pose that I have it all together.

*In that sense, prayer is surrender. Prayer is exercising the muscles of powerlessness. My hands empty and despairing of my own ability. He alone is worthy. He alone is worthy. Worthy are You, Lord! Help me to see that more and more!

One area: outreach... I don't know how to do this, Lord. I know that people in the past were attracted to our church b/c it was the beautiful country looking white church by the horse farm. And now, all these changes around us, all these apt complexes and retail all around us. Show us the way, Lord.

And He does: worship and prayer are the work of the Church. Worship and prayer based on the truth of His Word are the work of the minister. Prayer is the foundation and work of anything of lasting value being accomplished for the Kingdom. This is why we have the **boiler room** > the engine room of the church, the engine room of the worship service is prayer.

3. Prayer is costly

I was doing some research on incense and came across frankincense – derived from a tree that only grows in desert regions of the Arabian peninsula. At one time it was worth its weight in gold b/c of its rarity and fragrance.

The point is: incense is expensive. Extravagant even. We spend money on what is valuable to us. We spend time on what is valuable to us.

See what God is saying about prayer here: Prayer is all in. It requires your whole person, your whole self, it is a surrender, it is a giving, it is an acknowledging of your powerlessness. And so, of course, prayer will be hard. (Keller quote)

It is costly to us, but look at what it cost God to give us this gift of prayer, this access to Him.

The One standing at the throne of God, the One being in all the universe worthy of opening the scroll to unseal the plan of God and the resolution of history – the defeat of evil, sin, death – He is the Lamb who has been slain. But He is now standing with 7 horns – symbol of absolute military power –

But look at what it cost Him. So that we will worship Him with our prayers. He alone is worthy!

Those of you in sales — how do you sell your most expensive item? In college I worked in a men's suit shop. How in the world do you sell Norman Hilton \$1200 suits? By putting them on the client when he walks in. Once you put one of those on, you compare it to what you have been wearing and you say, wow, how could I go back to a \$600 suit?

When you see prayer for what it is, for the blessing it is to you and to God, how could you go back to checking scores or the news or social media? God wants us to see prayer for what it is - this sweet, incredibly valuable, priceless gift that it is to us and to Him, so that you will surrender and pray.

Pray:

God, give me a desire for You, for Your kingdom, for Your truth, for Your power to be made real in and through me, and in our church. Make our church a true house of prayer, that our engine is prayer, our ministry is motivated and empowered by prayer. That You will make more of Yourself, and we will become less and less. That the world will look and see and marvel... who them? No, not them, but their God, their Savior, His Spirit living in and through us for His glory.

Bene: To Him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by His blood and made us a kingdom, priests to His God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. Rev 1:5-6