

Current Affairs #90 – The Prayers of the Saints

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We continue to make our way through the Book of Revelation, and we are at the 8th chapter. To refresh your memory, it says,

And I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and to them were given seven trumpets (Revelation 8:2 NKJV).

Again, these are the final things: the number seven implying that it is the time for the wrapping up of things. The seven trumpets are seven announcements. These are the sayings of God, spoken into the earth, that shake not only the heavens, but also the earth, in that they bring forth the things that God always intended to put into the earth, and they announce the coming forth of them in the appointed seasons. That being said, the heavens and the earth would be shaken, and the things God means to bring in will shift and change the entire trajectory of the present form of human enterprise and endeavor to accommodate the things that God is doing. He goes on to say,

Then another angel, having a golden censer, came and stood at the altar. He was given much incense, that he should offer it with the prayers of all the saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne. And the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, ascended before God from the angel's hand. Then the angel took the censer, filled it with fire from the altar, and threw it to the earth. And there were noises, thunderings, lightnings, and an earthquake (Revelation 8:3-5).

To properly understand this symbolism here in the 8th chapter, we must go back and take a look at the replica of the golden altar of incense that was once placed in the earth, and placed in the tabernacle that Moses was instructed to build in the wilderness. It is fascinating, the sequence of things as God was structuring how His presence would be honored amongst the people when He enacted the covenantal order of the law of Moses. Beginning with Exodus 19, God tells Moses that He is about to invite the people of Israel to come up into a covenantal relationship with God. In Exodus 19, the instruction God gives Moses is to say to the people, “Although the whole earth is Mine, you will be for Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. Go and say this to Israel.”

Now, they ran from the presence of God and would not come into that covenant, so the order of Levi and the law of Moses was given; and the Scriptures are plain on the subject: they were given until the Seed should come.¹ God knew ahead of time that Israel would not enter into the invitation of God to become part of a royal priesthood—a kingdom of priests and a holy nation—so He gave them that which was a type and shadow. As He is establishing this type and shadow, He is putting into it, things that relate to this offering to be a royal priesthood and a holy nation that He knew they were going to reject. But God remains undeterred from what He means to do. Even when men turn away, in the midst of their turning away, He installs things that would be prominent and prophetic symbols, so that when they come back, those things being resurrected would, in a sense, show that even though they departed from God, God never changed what He intended to give.

When Israel departed, then, from the promise of being a royal priesthood and a holy nation, God began by giving them the law. Then He proceeded to tell them how to understand the law amongst themselves. So, He reset their culture. Their culture until now was that of Egyptian culture: the mindset of slavery. He gives them the template of the law—the Ten Commandments and the 311 laws in the Book of the Law—that was designed to recreate an identity away from slavery to the restoration of the promise that would shape and determine how they would function as a people.

Following that, God then began to describe how His presence would come in amongst them. And so He described the forms of worship, or the forms that He would inhabit, which, by themselves, are types and shadows of heavenly things. They would include instructions about making the Ark of the Covenant central to how He would relate to them—how His presence would come and dwell amongst them—and what they would be required to do to construct the tabernacle, the housing of His presence. So first the Ark of the Covenant, and then the structure that would house His presence, and then the other things that relate to how they would approach His presence within His House. All these things speak, of course, of the Body of Christ, how we would approach God by being reconciled to God in Christ, how we would become a new creation, and so on. I do not have time here to go into what were the things put in the Ark of the Covenant.

All Scripture quotations are from the NKJV Bible, unless otherwise noted.

¹ See Galatians 3:19: “What purpose then *does* the law *serve*? It was added because of transgressions, till the Seed should come to whom the promise was made; *and it was* appointed through angels by the hand of a mediator.”

Then He would instruct such things as the making of the menorah, the seven-branch candelabra, which would indicate how His presence would bring light to the understandings of the people. Then He would talk about how they would make a golden altar for the burning of incense. That is really the point to which we have come in this discussion, when in the Book of Revelation, the 8th chapter, in heaven the archetype, the reality, is presented against the background of the type and shadow that was initially put as God was forming a people who were a type and shadow of a holy people, namely the Body of Christ, to come at the end of the age. So, you see this movement through history.

It benefits us now to go back and to look at this altar from which the angel took fire. We will talk about the angel himself, but I am wanting to set up the understanding of what is going on. This golden altar of incense was placed before the Ark of the Covenant. The Ark of the Covenant is indicative of the presence of God, where God's presence dwelt among the Israelites in the wilderness—the Holy of Holies. [This is not the bronze altar for the offering of animal sacrifices that was set outside of the Holy of Holies, outside of the tabernacle. Jesus would be crucified outside of the city. But I do not have time to go into that.] This is the golden altar of incense, and it is set before the presence of God. Why? And Aaron is given this instruction: in the morning he should burn sweet incense—every morning while he is tending the lamps, he should burn incense on this altar; and in the evening he should burn incense on the altar.² This incense represented the perpetual prayers of the saints going up to God.

Now the fire that was put upon this censer on which incense was put, the fire came from the altar of burnt offerings. We would see that earlier on. God said this strange thing, in verse 9 of Exodus 30, that has the reference to the instructions for the building of the golden altar of incense. He said,

You shall not offer strange incense on it, or a burnt offering, or a grain offering; nor shall you pour a drink offering on it (Exodus 30:9).

² See Exodus 30:7-8: “Aaron shall burn on it sweet incense every morning; when he tends the lamps, he shall burn incense on it. And when Aaron lights the lamps at twilight, he shall burn incense on it, a perpetual incense before the LORD throughout your generations.”

Why shouldn't they? Because this was a unique representation. It was meant to represent, if you like, the prayers of the saints. Now I want to read from the Book of Leviticus, the 10th chapter, an unusual happening. It concerned the two sons of Aaron. Aaron was the high priest, and Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, were given the responsibility to place fire from the altar of burnt offerings, sacrifices, to place fire from that on the censer which would contain the incense, to take it into the golden altar where the incense would be burned before God—representing, of course, the prayers of the saints. Here is the story.

Then Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, each took his censer and put fire in it, put incense on it, and offered profane fire before the Lord, which He had not commanded them (Leviticus 10:1).

So they got fire from their cookfires. They were going to save themselves the time to stop by the altar of burnt offerings to get fire from there, from the sacrificial fires. They were going to save themselves one extra trip, one extra stop on their way to the golden altar, so they got fire from their cookfires, from their own domestic pleasure, and they put that fire on the censer with the incense and brought it in to offer the incense before God.

So fire went out from the Lord and devoured them, and they died before the Lord. And Moses said to Aaron, “This is what the Lord spoke, saying:

*‘By those who come near Me
I must be regarded as holy;
And before all the people
I must be glorified.’ ” (Leviticus 10:2-3a).*

God had extremely strict instructions for those who represented Him to the people. He will not permit as prayers, whatever we want. This whole folly of attempting to make God into Santa Claus, by presenting to God our wish list, not the prayers that come from hearts of sacrifice, but the prayers that come from the hearts of convenience, prayers that emanate from our lust, from our desires, are strange fire, strange offerings before God. I have much to say about that, but not now.

Part of that which is being judged in the present order of things is this strange fire, the offerings of profane things to the Lord, in exchange for goods and services. We have been told that what pleases God are sacrifices of money. But the Scriptures make it very plain: that the sacrifice that is acceptable, which may be demonstrated by money, but not money itself, is the sacrifice of our being. The widow with the two mites did in fact sacrifice money, but what was behind the sacrifice? What was said by Jesus concerning her? That she had first given herself, because the two mites represented the extent of all the wealth she possessed (cf. Mark 12:41-44). So it is said by Paul, when he was praising the believers in Macedonia, that they gave generously of their means and beyond, but they first gave themselves.³

By the time you come to this altar in heaven, this is the reality, the type and shadow of which is what we just read about in the 30th chapter of Exodus and in the 10th chapter of Leviticus. I read that to you to show God’s attitude toward what He views as profane prayers: prayers of convenience, prayers that would have us remain unsacrificed before God. So much so, that Romans the 12th chapter says,

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God (Romans 12:1-2).

Prayers that come from an untransformed mind are prayers about your physical, financial, and other forms of natural well-being. It is not inappropriate to ask God for those things, but they must come out of this heart of a sacrificed life. And then your prayers are exactly as He would have you pray. This goes back to the issue of faith, the word *pistis*.⁴ *Pistis* is where we get the term “epistemology.” It means, what you stand on, what is foundational to you, what is the conviction upon which your life stands.

³ See 2 Corinthians 8:1-5

⁴ See *pistis*, Strong’s Greek 4102 - <https://biblehub.com/greek/4102.htm>

So, this other angel has a golden censer and comes before the altar where the prayers of the saints have come up for a memorial before God. I use that term to reference the Book of Acts, the 10th chapter, that has to do with a statement made to Cornelius, because the angel said to Cornelius, “Your prayers and your alms have come up for a memorial before God.” Because Cornelius was, first and foremost, a righteous man. Do not be surprised in these times when we are seeing the prayers of the unrighteous being rejected by God, even as the unrighteous themselves are being thrown out of the temple of God as money-changers. This angel was given much incense that he should offer it.

Incense, of course, was sweet-smelling. I do not have time to unpack what the incense was comprised of,⁵ but part of it was frankincense, and I believe a mixture with myrrh, which were some of the things presented to Christ at His birth, signifying the offering of His indestructible life. They were gifts not only fit for a king, but fit for the living God who had come as that sacrifice. His life was the sacrifice, and the gifts typified what that sacrifice was meant to be. We, who follow in His steps, are meant to be sacrificed as well. So out of this sacrificial life, then, the prayers of the saints are mixed with the symbols of sacrifice, which are the ingredients of the incense placed upon fire taken from the altar of sacrifice.

On earth they were depicted on the altar of incense; in heaven it references this altar, which may or may not be an actual altar, but a condition of the saints. We saw before that the saints were under the altar,⁶ and they were the ones beheaded for the witness of Christ.⁷ So the concept of sacrifice, and the prayers of the saints, and the golden altar all merge into this one picture in heaven.

Now I want to comment briefly on the angel who had the censer, who mixed the prayers of the saints with incense upon the altar, and was given much incense. Let me go back to and bring this

⁵ See Exodus 30:34-38

⁶ See Revelation 6:9: “When He opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the testimony which they held.”

⁷ See Revelation 20:4b: “Then *I saw* the souls of those who had been beheaded for their witness to Jesus and for the word of God, who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received *his* mark on their foreheads or on their hands.”

forward, about the ordering of the Book of Revelation. What is it? Let us go back to chapter 1, and we will read verse 1.

The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show His servants—things which must shortly take place. And He sent and signified it by His angel to His servant John,
(Revelation 1:1)

What am I saying? Here you have this angel with the golden censer, with the prayers of the saints on it, which he is about to hurl into the earth. When it is hurled into the earth, it becomes the fulfillment to the prayers of the saints, and that brings judgment upon the earth.

This is the role that Christ Himself was given. I read you the first verse of the Book of Revelation, and what do we have? We have a revelation that God gave to the Lamb. It is the Lamb who is opening the seals. While He was on the earth, He did not know even the time of His own return: “No man knows the day nor the hour, not the angels in heaven, not the Son, but the Father only” (cf. Matthew 24:36). But now, in the Book of Revelation—and this was given in approximately 85 AD, and Jesus had died by 33 AD, more or less, so you have forty-two years difference—Jesus is already back in heaven when John is invited to come, and now Jesus knows the time of His own return. The Lamb now knows because He has been given the revelation that He did not have while He was on the earth: “The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him.” And how does He make it known to John, who is writing these things? By sending His angel. The role that this angel has is uniquely the role that Jesus has, because this angel, with the prayers of the saints, is in a role of the mediator. “There is one Mediator between God and man, the Man Christ Jesus” (cf. 1 Timothy 2:5). He is the One who hears our prayers. He is the One who brings our offerings of praise and prayers before the Father. He is that Mediator. He assigns the role to this angel, just like He said He would, and He does that at the point of the opening of the seventh seal.

What does that mean? It means Jesus is behind all of this. The power that is moving everything forward to the conclusion is the power that was given to the Lamb. It is the Lamb who is opening the seals. It is the Lamb who is authorizing all of what is to happen.

*Then the angel took the censer, filled it with fire from the altar, and threw it to the earth.
(Revelation 8:5a)*

An abundant demonstration that the prayers of the saints, which have been collected up, which have been held in trust, waiting for the appropriate time, the prayers are being revealed as answered upon the earth. When they do, there are noises:

And there were noises, thunderings, lightnings, and an earthquake (Revelation 8:5b).

All that Christ has meant to do, all that He showed the church to be and to do, He is about to do now, even as the seven angels prepare to sound their trumpets.

I am Sam Soleyn. We will continue this discussion. See you then. Bye-bye.