

Aaron had one job. Keep the Israelites out of trouble while Moses went to have a little chat with God. And how difficult could that be? As it turns out, it was so difficult that when Moses gets ready to come back, he has to offer a prayer of intercession first. The Israelites? Their lives depended on it.

Today we return to our series, "Lettuce Pray: A Spiritual Salad." Our focus today is prayers of intercessions offered through out the bible. Iceberg lettuce of Intercession.

Paul was a master of intercessory prayer. All throughout his letters he can be found offering up prayers for his fledgling churches. He prayed for the church at Philippi, He prayed for the church at Corinth. He prayed for the churches of Galatia. He prayed for the church at Thessalonica.

Jesus offered many prayers of intercession. It was this prayer of intercession that Jesus offered from the cross. "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing."

Prayers of intercession. Praying God's blessing on another person. It's the type of prayer that we are the most likely to pray. Just in the past week I've offered prayers of intercession for family, friends, church members, even a few that I don't like so well.

Just a few minutes ago we talked about people here in our church family that we are praying for. We intercede for someone who is ill. For a married couple going through a rough patch. For someone who's lost a loved one. Broken bones, broken marriages, wayward finances, wayward children. Lost pets and even lost keys.

These are good prayers. These prayers are all part of God's plan. We are called to bear one another's burdens. Paul said it was a way for us to fulfill the law of Christ.

Intercessory prayer is glue. It's what binds us together as a people of faith. We come together to seek healing for those who are sick and afflicted. We come together to seek justice for those who are persecuted and oppressed. We come together to seek mercy for those who are guilty and those who are graceless.

Mercy for those who were guilty and graceless. That was the Israelites and they messed up big time.

It all started back in Egypt. The Israelites were forced into slavery when a Pharaoh arose that didn't know Joseph. God used both Moses and Aaron to bring plagues on the Egyptians to convince them to let the Israelite slaves go. The Egyptians finally relented and like that, the Israelites were headed to the promised land.

The dust hardly settled on the departure of the Israelites when the Egyptians change their mind. Led by Pharaoh, they made a dash to chase down their slaves. The Red sea was just ahead. Aha...they had them. The Israelites would be trapped.

Except they weren't. God had a plan. A wind blew and dried up the sea so that the Israelites could cross. And cross they did. The Egyptians saw their slaves going across the dry land that used to be a sea. Well, if it was good enough for the Israelites, it was good enough for their chariots. The Egyptians got to the middle of the sea. They were so close! Then they found out why not worshipping the God of Israel was a big mistake. The sea closed back up and many of the Egyptians drowned. By and by, the Israelites made their way to Mount Sinai. The mountain of God.

You'd think after seeing all the plagues and the events of the Red Sea, that Israel would have no problem knowing that Yhwh is Yhwh. Israel would have no problem both knowing and following Yhwh. But as Moses' prayer told us. This was a stiff-necked people!

Back in chapter 20 God starts out by giving Moses and the Israelites the ten commandments. In person. Live. But the Israelites were terrified. They did not want to hear God's voice anymore. They thought they were going to die. (You thought your kids were dramatic) So, they sent Moses up the mountain to get the rest of the law from God.

All Aaron and the people of Israel had to do was wait. All they needed to do was wait for Moses to pray. It can't take that long right? I mean most of us are ready to stop praying after the first minute.

In all fairness to the people of Israel. This was a REALLY long time of prayer. Moses' time with God starts all the way back in chapter 20 and doesn't finish until chapter 31. That's 11 full chapters of time with God. 40 days and 40 nights.

What were God and Moses talking about all that time? They talked about the altar and sacrifices. They talked about the tabernacle. They talked about the Ark of the Covenant and what was to be kept in there. They talked about how to conduct their courts, what priest should wear and what festivals to observe. They talked about a sabbath day each week and giving the land a growing sabbath every 7 years.

They talked about slaves. They talked about violence. God told Moses things like...no sacrificing to other gods. When you lend money to the poor among you, don't charge interest. Don't eat mangled meat. No roadkill!

You can see why all of this would take so long to go over. When they were finally done, God bundled all this up into 2 tablets of stone and sent Moses on his way.

Back at the foot of Mt. Sinai. The people got restless. They began to get suspicious. Moses. Maybe he wasn't coming back. Maybe he was dead. They went to Aaron and demanded that he make a god for them. Not only does Aaron cave immediately, he enacts the plan for collecting gold from everyone. They melt it and forge it into something that could be worshipped. A golden calf. This was a practice of one of the Egyptian religions.

God and Moses are still together. God knows what's going on. Can you imagine the conversation.

God: Pst...Moses...look...

Moses: Face palm...oof...

God: I'm gonna kill em. I'm gonna kill them all. But I'll start all over. With you. I will make a new people with you.

Moses steps in with his prayer. In this prayer he reminds God of his promises to be faithful to these people. He reminds God of his promise to Abraham and Isaac. Moses rejects the invitation to be the father of a new people.

This makes me think of a question here. How often are our prayers run-of the mill...almost flippant. So often our prayers demand very little from us. Not with Moses. His prayer his intercession transcends mere well-wishing. This prayer demands his full participation in the plight of the people of Israel. His prayer is unyielding, uncompromising, selfless. His intercession is a longing for the well-being of others. So, what if we prayed like this. Would it make a difference? Do our prayers make a difference?

Tony Campolo is a well-known pastor, and motivational speaker. He tells this story about a prayer meeting that was held for him just before he spoke at college chapel service.

Men took him to a back room and had him kneel. They laid their hands on his head and prayed. They prayed for a long time. The longer they prayed, the more tired they got. The more tired they got, the more they leaned on his head. His neck was killing him.

Plus, one of the guys was not even praying for Tony. He was praying for someone named Charlie Stolfus: “Dear Lord, you know Charlie Stolfus. He lives in that silver trailer down the road a mile. You know the trailer. Lord, just down the road on the right-hand side. Charlie told me this morning that he’s going to leave his wife and three kids. Step in and do something, God. Bring that family back together.”

The prayer finally ended, Tony preached and then started driving home. On his way he noticed a hitchhiker and felt compelled to give him a ride.

‘They drove for a few minutes and then Tony said: “Hi my name’s Tony Campolo. What’s yours?” He said, “My name is Charlie Stolfus.” Tony couldn’t believe it!

Tony got off the turnpike at the next exit and headed back. Charlie got a little uneasy. After a few minutes he said, “Hey mister, where are you taking me?”

Tony said, "I'm taking you home."

Charlie's eyes grew wide. "Why?" he asked.

"Because you just left your wife and three kids, right?"

"Yeah, that's right." Shock was written all over his face.

Tony drove right to his silver trailer. He knew the way. Charlie's eyes seemed ready to pop out.

"How did you know that I lived here?"

Tony said, "God told me." (this wasn't a lie)

When Charlie opened the trailer door his wife exclaimed, "You're back!" "You're back!" Charlie whispered in her ear and the more he talked the bigger her eyes got.

Then Tony said with real authority, "You two, sit down. I'm going to talk and you are going to listen!" That afternoon they accepted Christ and their marriage was saved.

Not all intercessions will be this dramatic. Most of them will be quite mundane. But Our Iceberg lettuce of Intercession. It's serious business. To pray a prayer of intercession doesn't have to be difficult. It can be as simple as this. "Lord, give these people every blessing that you have intended for me."

Amen...