

Revelation 8

by John McGregor

In Revelation 8, John McGregor emphasizes the power of prayer as it ascends to God's throne, highlighting its significance in our relationship with Him and the supernatural responses it invokes.

Duration: 38:36

Scripture: Acts 16:25-26, Acts 16:29-30

Topics: "Revelation"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker shares a personal experience of being robbed in Namibia. Despite being told that it was unlikely to recover the stolen items, the speaker and his companion prayed to God for help. Miraculously, within 30 minutes, everything they had lost was returned to them, except for the wallet. The speaker emphasizes the importance of faith, obedience, and trust in God, and highlights the power of supernatural, Holy Spirit-directed prayer. The sermon concludes with the reminder that God is always present and able to answer prayers, even in the face of fear and impossible situations.

Transcript

So expectancy is one of those things that we see in silence, isn't it? There's something coming. And as you think about heaven, it is full of worship, it is full of praise, it is full of the adoration and love of God, and here at the beginning of this chapter, there's a silence, just silence. Seven angels are given those seven trumpets.

They're gonna sound them in a little bit. The powers of darkness are about to be conquered and vanquished. One angel, though, in our text, verse three, says another angel came and stood at the altar.

And that's the one I want to think about this morning for our moments as we worship him in the word. This angel who comes to this golden altar. And what is that all about? He comes to the altar of incense before the mercy seat.

And I just wanted to take us to Exodus 30 because that's where the instructions were given about this golden altar. So may I begin one of four thoughts this morning just in talking about the prayer altar from the Old Testament? And what is it that we ought to know as we look into this scene in heaven where there is also, just as there was in the tabernacle, that golden altar? And as we think about the altar, it is placed in the tabernacle just before the curtain between the holy place and the holy of holies. It's right there almost up against that curtain.

Only incense was to be offered on this altar. It stands in the Old Testament case for the prayers of Jesus, the intercessor, the high priest, the great high priest. And a sweet smell was meant to fill that chamber both in the holy of holies and in the holy place as that incense went up.

And as we think about it, that altar is a type of Christ. There's the breath of love and the sweetness that he has for his children as those incense rise and as his prayers rise on your behalf and mine. I am so glad we have such a savior, such an intercessor, not alone, not in any way abandoned, but one whose love is stronger than life itself.

And you know, we also have a pattern for our prayers, our communion with God. Every heavenly blessing comes to us through prayer. Now, you'll have to forgive me this morning because in lots of ways, prayer is my hobby horse.

And if you don't get anything else, you'll see the preacher can get excited once in a while. But my prayer is this morning that God would just let us move aside the veil a little, just enough to really catch a heart passion for this thing that we call prayer. Well, we said we'd look at the altar of prayer, the Old Testament example in Exodus.

Here are just nine simple short thoughts about that altar. The altar was built of the most incorruptible wood and covered with gold, which is that which is least perishable in our human understanding of things. And our Lord has a twofold incorruptible nature too, doesn't He? He is divine and He is human.

That is the Savior. And George, did I lose it? No, okay. The altar is crined.

I didn't go on and read it, but there's a crine on that altar of incense in the Old Testament tabernacle, just as there is on the place of the showbread in that. And our Savior is crined priest, high priest of all. And He is not a priest who is pleading in uncertainty.

He is a priest who is pleading in victory. And I get so encouraged by this. Do you ever get knocked down and think, well, what's the point in praying? I remember going to a house while I was pastoring in Saskatoon, and as I was coming in, the mother of the household was explaining to the teenage son, the pastor is coming, and he's gonna talk to us about the present difficulty.

And the young man said, oh, Mom, he's just gonna pray. And I thought, yeah, you know, that's sometimes how it must look. But Jesus, as He intercedes, isn't coming at it from a point of view of defeat.

He is praying from the place of victory. It's one of those things that when you stop and just consider our great intercessor, no wonder there was silence in heaven for half an hour. As we think about that, even the Old Testament altar, Jesus stands in great victory.

And you know what, church? We go from time to time through ups and downs, and it's not an accident that we have just a few chairs left this morning. We have our ups and downs, don't we? But the Lord Jesus always comes at things from victory side, and the Lord Jesus never lets go of His church, never lets us down, never lets us fade into insignificance in His heart, because His heart is for His children and for His own. Thirdly, the altar in the Old Testament is the highest object in the tabernacle.

Did you know that? You check it out, dig it out for yourself. That altar of incense is the highest place in the tabernacle. What do you think that ought to say to you and me? I'll tell you what I take out of it.

I take out of it that prayer is the most exalted ministry that we can ever engage in. And I gotta tell you, there are times when we need to just pray and turn spiritual warfare aside, when we need to just get down flat dirty with the devil and say, you didn't buy this real estate, you don't own this real estate, so in the Irish vernacular, get lost. Here is that sense in the Old Testament prayer altar where you see it is the highest spot and it is the most exalted ministry.

The altar has four horns. They point north, south, east, and west because all His people everywhere are to be able to come in prayer. And everyone has that opportunity.

And there's one little word used in Revelation 8, we'll look at it in a minute, that I think will encourage us in this sense. The altar was not stationary. You know, often in the Old Testament, they'd raise up an altar and it was in one place, which meant that everybody had to truck over there to it.

I worked with a bunch of people in Ireland when I was growing up, and they were forever going to Lourdes in France or to a place called the Windy Gap where the Virgin Mary had supposedly appeared and so on. What was happening is something significant maybe happened and people had to go there. But the altar is movable.

It goes on poles. It's meant to be carried by and with the people of God. It is meant to be available so that we can be near Him anywhere.

And I so love that thought. The altar always had fire burning on it. Do you ever pray, Lord, let the fire fall? I used to love to get Bud Alford to teach about prayer when I was at CRF because Bud had all kinds of experiences in the North and working through things.

And one of the stories he told us one day was he prayed when he went to minister in his First Nations village, he prayed, Lord, let the fire fall. And he said the first place it fell was on his lawnmower. It burned right up.

And the second place that the fire fell was on his garden shed, gone. And the third place that the fire fell was on his house when he went to church one Sunday. And his wife said, Bud, for goodness sake, change your prayer.

But you see, as you look at this, the fire is constantly on the altar there in the tabernacle. And it's to remind us to pray continually, always. Isn't that what the New Testament says? Praying always and with all the saints? Yeah.

The altar had incense. Incense was made up of four parts. We only know one of them, that's frankincense.

Interesting, isn't it? That secret recipe. Some things we know and some things we do not. And it's the same in prayer, isn't it? There are some things that we know when we come to the altar and there are some things that we do not.

But we should not get to the place of trying to figure that all out just to pour out our hearts before our God. And there are things in the mystery of God that we will probably never know until we get to the other side altogether. Don't worry about those unknowns.

The altar reminds us that they're told later in Exodus 30 to beat that mixture, that incense, very small. And I stopped and thought about that when I was researching for the message. Make it really small.

You know, we sometimes forget that the Lord hears the smallest prayer. The faintest cry, He hears it. And He tells us in the prophet Micah, "Don't despise the day of small things." And sometimes I've been guilty of saying, I don't think I need to pray about that.

That's such a small thing. But I think the Lord tells us, pray about everything. Well, the last of the nine, the altar is positioned between the two chambers.

The holiest place and the holy of holies. And prayer is what positions us at the gate of heaven while our feet are here on earth. Three things I want us then to move and just think about, three very simple facts from Revelation 8 and these first five verses.

As you think about that golden altar in the tabernacle, see nigh the golden altar in heaven. And there is one sitting on the throne. So the first of the three I wanna just dig in for a few minutes this morning is that prayer ascends to the throne.

Verse three says that He mixed that incense with the prayers of the saints and it ascended to the throne. Who is God? We're back to being interactive. It's okay to talk to the preacher.

Who is God? He's a father. He's almighty. What other names come to your mind as you think of God? He is love.

Savior. Sweet Lord Jesus. Creator.

Sustainer. He's just. You know, we could go on easy half an hour just thinking about who God is.

Now, who are we? His children. Good word, Michael. If we are in Christ Jesus, if He is our Savior, we are indeed called children of God.

And you know, it never ceases ever to amaze me, to captivate my Irish imagination that as you think about the prayers of the saints, someone like little old fat me, where do those words go? The prayers of the saints. Where do they go? To the throne. And dear friend, if nothing moves you this morning, this ought to, that the one on the throne allows those prayers to come before His face.

And you know, I've prayed some pretty loopy things. How about you? Oh, I'm not alone. Praise the Lord.

I know I'm not alone. Yeah, you see, those prayers ascend to the throne. And it is faith-believing prayer that we are to be active in, isn't it? Sometimes we pray in unbelief.

Sometimes we pray selfishly. But it is faith-believing prayer that rises before the throne. Believing that no matter the circumstances, no matter the degree of difficulty, God who sits on the throne can and will do something about it.

And you know, from one end of the Bible to the other, you just find this, that there is prayer, and then God intervenes. And there's prayer, and then God intervenes. I'm being careful not to go woo-hoo this morning.

But you know, sometimes we lose sight of it all in the midst of all the stuff that flies around. We can so easily misplace where it is we need to go. Just like in the Old Testament, the high priest brought that incense before the altar and it ascended to the Lord.

So our prayers here in Revelation 8, 1 through 5, are mixed with the incense and come before the throne. You think about the total lostness of humanity, sinners that God redeems, and I wonder what the angels must sometimes think. Who are you listening to, Lord? Oh, Him again.

Didn't He ask for that last week, Lord? Yeah. Are you gonna give it to Him again? Yeah. You see it? This thing of prayer.

It ascends before the Almighty. You think about the total helplessness of His church. What is it that brought us two millennia since the departure of Jesus? I know it's all the great preachers that we've had over those years, right? It's all the sense of business management and all those kind of things that helped us to forge ahead, right? Marlene's smiling at me over there.

No, I haven't lost it. You know, and I know, it's prayer. And as we think about just that sense, even as the body of Christ and the things that we will face throughout this year and in the coming years, think about this.

Oh, how we need to be a praying people, surrendered as those prayers go to His throne. Well, sometimes we have the impossibility of our possession. And you say, oh, but pastor, you don't know what it's like.

You don't know the things that I face. And yeah, that's right. I don't.

I remember in Elk Point, after I went to work for the Billy Graham Association and the church called a new man and he didn't have to worry about me upsetting things because I was gone 27 days a month, right? And so all credit that four children were raised without being killed goes to this lady. But I remember the pastor saying to me, we have a problem. We have a financial problem.

We're really in a crisis. And I'm not sure what to do about it. And the people said, ask John.

And I smiled and said, they'll know, but let's just have a Saturday morning prayer meeting next Saturday. You know, by the time we came out of there, there still wasn't an answer, but everybody's heart was focused on the answer, the Lord Jesus, and that he had to do something on behalf of his people to make it work. And I remember they went to the bank and said, would it be all right if we just paid the interest and not the principal on our mortgage on the building for a while? And the banker said, sure.

And the pastor said, well, didn't expect that answer. And you know, piece by piece, not all in one lump, but it all came together. And you know, it must have worked okay because that guy's been there for 27 years in that church.

And God has honored and blessed his word. And they moved on from the little building that we watch God build to one that seats 400 today. Anyway, prayer ascends to the throne.

I'm gonna give a little advertisement. I was gonna put some of this into the message, but I don't think that I want to. I've been working on the prayer life of Jesus, and some of these days we're gonna have a workshop or something, maybe a series of messages, I don't know, on the prayer life of Jesus because there are eight Hebrew words that tie in with just waiting on God.

And somewhere in the process, we'll get to that, and we'll dig it out, and we'll learn to lean on what scripture teaches us about prayer. The second of the three that we want to touch on here in Revelation 8 is not only that prayer ascends to the throne, as verse three says, but prayer is heard by God. Wow.

God is the creator and the sustainer of all things, and he hears prayer. Hears it. Now, you say, Pastor, we know that.

That's so basic. Anybody knows that. So let me just mess with you then.

If we know it, how come we don't do it? Prayer is heard by God, by the living God. In Micah 7 and verse 7, the prophet says this. He's talking about all the people, his enemies, and all the stuff that's going wrong, and then he says this.

But my God shall hear me. You see, he knew one thing above all else. He knew that he had an audience at the throne of grace.

He knew that there was nothing to stop him from walking into that throne room, and that the Lord would hear it. All the stuff that goes on, yes, it's there. It's a part of life.

But my God shall hear me. Sorry if I blew your hearing aims. I think I got my pacemaker overworked.

But my God shall hear me. Prayer is an audience with him. There's a marvelous old story.

You might have heard it before, or maybe it's new to you, but a man called George Muller coming to North America, coming on a ship, coming to New York, and as the ship nears the coast, there's fog, and the captain says to Muller, I'm sorry, you're not gonna get there on time. And the captain was a Christian. And Muller said to the captain, let's pray.

Captain said, sail these waters a lot of years. Don't think it'll make any difference, but go ahead. And Muller prayed a fantastic prayer.

You should write this down. I mean, this is amazingly eloquent. Dear God, in Jesus' name, please move the fog, amen.

Isn't that powerful and emotional and sensational? And oh, man, we ought to put out a DVD, right, yeah. And the captain said, should I pray? And Muller said, nope. And about that time, somebody came into the captain's cabin and said to him, sir, the fog is moving.

And the captain looked at Muller and said, how'd you do that? How did you do that? And this was his answer. 54 years I've walked with Jesus, and I have never been denied an audience at the throne of his grace. Wow, God hears it.

You know, we came through a bit of a difficult year last year, didn't we? Many of us had all kinds of trials and things. And I wish I could tell you that it'll be easier this year. I believe in God for that.

But what I will tell you is this. When we put our hearts together at the throne of his grace, at the throne of grace, there's not all the demons in hell that can stop his church marching on. He hears prayer.

It's not prayer about my agenda, not for my glory. It's his glory and his glorious purpose. He delivers his people from slavery and injustice.

He delivers them from all kinds of things. He strengthens us and directs us in the middle of trials. He gives us the strength to go on through.

Somebody rightly said that he either lightens the load or strengthens your shoulders. And I think it's so true. He hears honest, faith-believing, God-seeking prayer.

You know, I was thinking about Gideon the other day. Three times Gideon says to the Lord, I'm just gonna set out this fleece. And three times the Lord does what he asks.

And have you ever noticed in that story, God coming back to Gideon because down the road when he has 30,000, God says, it's too many. Down to 3,000. And then a second time, God says, you know what? You still got too many to beat these guys.

Down to 300. Three times Gideon put out the fleece, three times God reduced the army. Think it's coincidence? I don't think so.

Because when that victory took place, there was no doubt who did it. And dear friends, you'll hear me say this tomorrow night at the annual meeting again. But if we walk into a building over there on Prince of Wales and Creekside and Seventh, it'll be so clearly him.

And oh, I really rejoice in that. I wish I could just let rip, but I'm not gonna. All right.

Thanks, Brad. Oh, he's so dependable. I love it.

He hears prayer. Dear ones, we need to be praying. Mistakes have been made in the past.

When there were hundreds of people, mistakes were made and that building never happened. When there were other obstacles, mistakes were made and it didn't happen. So if you could hear your pastor's heart this morning, just hear me say, stay on your knees, stay on your face before him and let it be for his glory, not ours.

Well, there's a third thing. How are we doing? We're actually doing good. It's only 12 o'clock.

Sorry. The third thing is this. Prayer that ascends to the throne that is heard by God brings a supernatural response to the earth.

You see it there in Revelation chapter eight. That angel, after he has mixed the incense and the prayers and they have risen, he takes the coals off the altar and he casts them to the earth. And it says there's noises and thunderings and lightnings and an earthquake and so on.

The angel is preparing for the judgment of God that's going to come. Do you know what, dear people of God? You need not fear the judgment of God that is to come upon this world. You need only to walk with him on that daily, intimate basis.

But just for a word of encouragement, would you keep your finger in there in Revelation eight and go back with me to Acts chapter 16 and verse 25? Because here's exactly what happens. Here's the other side of what we see in Revelation eight. Here it is, exactly the same thing.

Acts 16, 25 and following a little bit. But about midnight, Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns of praise to God and the prisoners were listening to them. And suddenly there came a great earthquake.

What did Revelation eight say? An earthquake. And so that the foundations of the prison house were shaken and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone's chains were unfastened. And when

the jailer awoke and saw the prison doors opened, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, supposing that the prisoners had escaped.

But Paul cried out in a loud voice saying, do not harm yourself for we are all here. The jailer called for lights and rushed in and trembling with fear, he fell down before Paul and Silas. And after he had brought them out, he said to them, sirs, what must I do to be saved? Chains fell off, doors were opened.

Unsaved people turned to God. Isn't that exactly what Revelation eight says? I don't know any nice way to say this other than just belt it out. What we need is not more great preachers, definitely not more great programs.

What we need is supernatural, Holy Spirit directed prayer. And God's supernatural answer into the middle of it. And all we have seen, if you look at church history over the years, when we come to that place, then we really are moving on to victory side.

Fear often grips us, how will we ever make it? Things look dark and impossible. God's not dead, and he's not deaf either. And you know, just in case you think this incident in Acts chapter 16 is so long ago with Paul and Silas, let me give you an incident from last week, okay? This is an email that I received last Wednesday.

It's from my friend Gerard de Toy. He's preaching in Southern Africa. I won't read the whole thing because it'd take too long.

But basically what he says is, had a marvelous service in Windhoek, the capital of Namibia, Namibia. And he says it was incredible. He's never seen people seeking after God like that.

Then in capitals, it says in his email, but next there was a crisis and an answer to prayer. When God is at work, we can expect the attacks of the evil one. That's exactly what happened.

We find ourselves being surrounded by six Namibian men right in the center of the city of Windhoek on the main street. Gerard was robbed of his wallet with all his visa cards, driver's license, et cetera. We were in shock.

The police came and took statements, and we were two hours giving reports to the police station. We were told that out of a city of 335,000 people, it's almost impossible to ever get anything back that is stolen but God. We prayed and asked God to take care of everything, but we were not expecting what happened next.

As soon as we returned to our room, Gerard's cell phone rang. In his wallet was a note with his cell phone number on it. On the other end of the phone was a gentleman who was a Hindu asking if this was Gerard de Toy.

Sir, I just found visa cards, your license, and other things right in front of my shop in the street. Have you lost your wallet or has it been stolen? Within 30 minutes after the call, God gave us everything back that we had lost except the actual wallet. The man said to Gerard, I could not get away from my conscience to get this back to you as soon as possible.

Gerard thanked him and spoke to him about Christ and told him that he wanted to meet him in heaven, and I won't tell you the rest of the story, but you see, there it is. I mean, so obviously. Anyway, our role is

to be faithful, steady, trust in God in obedience, and watch him as he answers prayer.

Let's pray. Forgive me for being long-winded this morning. Father, you have spoken to our hearts from your word about this thing that we call life.

We call it prayer, and oh, Father, we so need a fresh passion for it. And so we want to just come before you. There are things in our lives that we need to bring to you and only prayer can change them.

There are homes and prodigals and marriages and things that only prayer can touch and change. There are many heartaches and hurts, and only prayer can change them. So, Father, we would just come before you in these moments and pray that you would continue to do a work in us that you have started this morning to stir us in this thing of prayer, because we ask it in Jesus' name, amen.

Now, it's my pleasure this morning just to continue to worship, and as we continue to worship, one of the ways we do that is through our tithes and offerings. We ask our ushers to come, and as they come, they'll pass out those notepads, and you know, I've noticed lately the prayer requests seem to be diminishing, and I'm hoping this morning that His word went home and the prayer requests will grow, that we might pray one for another. May we ask His blessing as we worship Him in giving.

Father.

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