**Revelation 8:1-5**

Introduction

I. This passage gives us a powerful picture of the role of prayer in the world

II. What is your prayer life like?

A. On one hand, most of us struggle when it comes to prayer

 1. Cultural factors

a. We live in an achievement based culture where our lives are defined by what we do, accomplish, produce, and it’s hard to spend 20-30 minutes in prayer and have nothing tangible to show for it.

b. We live in a busied, hurried, distracted culture, and sitting still in silence for a period of time is very challenging for many of us

 2. Spiritual factors

 a. We lack the discipline and fortitude required for consistent prayer

b. The disciples falling asleep in Gethsemane when Jesus encouraged them to pray: “the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak.”

 3. Personal factors

 a. Some of us may have a theology that says prayer doesn’t matter

b. Some of us have experiences of praying the same passionate prayer for a long time (for healing, for a friend, for the sin in our own lives, etc.), and God has seemed silent and absent in that prayer, and that wound leaves us guarded when it comes to prayer

B. Yet we cannot help but pray

 a. Prayer is as natural as breathing

b. We are constantly bumping up against our limitations, and constantly offering up prayers to God for help

c. The foundation of every prayer is Jesus’ prayer: “Thy kingdom come” (that’s our ultimate desire in all our praying)

d. Revelation is God’s ultimate response to the prayer; “thy kingdom come.”

The Passage

I. Overview of the Passage

A. The 7th seal (like all of the 7ths in the series) brings in the end of history, the final judgment, and the coming of God’s kingdom (v. 5: thunder, lightning, earthquake. See also 11:15, 19 and 16:17-18)

B. This is a scene of the heavenly temple

 C. The central actor is the angel with the incense and prayers of the saints

See the connection between incense and prayer in Luke 1:8-10

D. Two movements in this scene: 1) prayers/incense going up before God and 2) fire going down to earth. What is the connection between these two movements?

II. God hears our prayers

A. 30 minutes of silence (v. 1)

All is silent so that God can hear the prayers of his people

 B. What are these prayers?

 1. See 6:9-10: “How long” until you establish justice?

2. We all can relate to that “how long” prayer, when we’re experiencing pain or injustice and God seems to not be responding

 C. God is listening to our prayers with favor

v. 3: “was given”: God is the one who gave this angel the censer, so he is orchestrating this whole scene which gives us great confidence that he wants to hear these prayers and respond favorably

 D. It’s remarkable that the Creator of the universe listens to our prayers

1. Zechariah and Elizabeth: “Do not be afraid, Zechariah; your prayer has been heard.” (Lk 1:13)

2. Israel in Egypt. “I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering. (Ex 3:7-8)

III. God responds powerfully to the prayers of his people

A. The connection between v. 4 and 5

1. v. 5 is God’s answer to v. 4.

2. God is answering the prayers of his people

3. All those prayers (“how long?” “Your kingdom come”) are gathered up before him, and he responds by finally judging the injustice in the world and bringing his kingdom of peace, joy, and righteousness

4. Prayer is what moves God to finally bring his kingdom

B. The power of prayer to make a difference

1. “Reversed Thunder” (Eugene Peterson)

Only God can send thunder from heaven to earth. But our prayers are like reversed thunder from earth to heaven. And they are powerful because they move the God of the universe to move in power.

2. Prayer as satellite technology (John Piper)

1) Before satellite technology, a tv network could only broadcast a certain range, but by sending a signal first to a satellite, it can now broadcast all over the world.

2) In prayer, we can send our prayers to God which can then have an impact in any part of the world by God’s power.

C. Prayer is the primary way we can participate in God’s action/power in the world

1. God doesn’t need our prayers, but in his sovereignty he has chosen to use our prayers as the means that move him to act in the world

2. He loves being asked, and he loves involving us through prayer in his plans and purposes

 a. Most of the great revivals started in response to people praying

b. George Muller provided for 10,000 orphans only through prayer without ever asking for financial support from anyone

 c. The final revival (God’s kingdom) will come in response to prayer

Conclusion

What if as individuals, we really believed that prayer was the most powerful and productive thing we could do? What if our church truly became a house of prayer (as per Jesus desire: “my father’s house will be a house of prayer.”)

**Discussion Questions**

1. On Sunday we talked about some factors that negatively impact our relationship with prayer (cultural, spiritual, and personal factors). Which of those factors do you identify with, and how does that impact your prayers?

2. What has been a helpful idea, practice, or habit that has brought life into your own experience of prayer?

3. How did understanding Revelation 8:1-5 increase your appreciation for or understanding of prayer? And what questions did it raise for you regarding prayer?

4. On Sunday the statement was made: “prayer is one of the primary ways we can participate in God’s action in the world.” Consider the statements made in IIIC above. How do you understand the relationship between God’s sovereignty and the power of prayer?

5. Is there anything specific you want to do in response to Sunday’s passage?