

The Gospel in Revelation

The intercession of Christ's great sacrifice is not just for believers. Christ mediates for all men and asks us to do the same. Let's take a look at a tremendous Bible promise that speaks to this very point.

"And this is the confidence that we have in Him, that, if we ask any thing according to His will, He heareth us: And if we know that He hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of Him. If any man see his brother sin a sin which is not unto death, he shall ask, and He shall give him life for them that sin not unto death. There is a sin unto death: I do not say that he shall pray for it" (1 John 5:14-16).

John is talking here about prayer confidence. When we pray, God *will* hear and answer us. Not that we can simply pray for anything our little hearts desire and expect God to comply. We are still faulty humans, prone to ask for things we shouldn't. Yet, when we pray "according to His will," He is anxious to grant it. And what is the will of God? The apostle Peter states it emphatically. God is "not *willing* that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9). It is God's will that all mankind repent and be saved. When we pray for the salvation of souls, God does everything short of violating the sinners will to save him.

Let's put all this together. We are called to pray for all people because Christ ransomed all. He is not willing that one sinner be lost. And He will give life to those we pray for. What a powerful group of Bible truths. We are called to intercede for those who are lost because this is what being a Christian is really all about (Luke 23:34).

There are so many things we *could* pray for, but the lost is who we *should* pray for. This is why John gave us an inspired suggestion that sinners should be our prayer priority!

God's saints are not just to pray for themselves. They must not become selfishly caught up in their own salvation, losing sight of the big picture. Rather than becoming a narrow-minded group of exclusive, self-righteous perfectionists, we must continually remember we are saved solely by the merits of Christ (2 Peter 1:9, 12).

The first priority of the saints is the same as Christ's. He came to seek and save the lost (Luke 19:10). God's true saints pray for all men, even for presidents and politicians. (Which says a lot in today's political environment).

Christ takes those prayers to the Father. And what happens then? Let's read the verse again. "If anyone sees his brother committing what is not a mortal sin, he will ask, and God will give him life for those whose sin is not mortal" (1 John 5:16, RSV).

As long as the sinner has not gone past the point of no return, we are

to pray and "life" is given, even for those who are sinning. This is why Paul could say to unbelievers who did not acknowledge the true God, "For in Him we live, and move, and have our being" (Acts 17:28).

In this way even unbelievers are "in Him," or "in Christ," in a temporary and temporal sense. They owe every breath of air and every morsel of food to the cross of Christ. In this sense, too, Christ is the "Savior of all men," for all humanity would have been destroyed long ago without Him (1 Timothy 4:10).

This is the message of glad tidings. This "life," says the apostle Paul, is freely bestowed upon the sinner before he even asks for it. It is extended to all to bring us to the realization of God's goodness and to lead us to "seek the Lord, if haply [we] might feel after Him, and find Him, though He be not far from every one of us" (Acts 17:27). God's goodness leads "all men everywhere to repent" (Romans 2:4; Acts 17:30). The very fact that God calls men everywhere to repent is itself evidence He has already bestowed this goodness upon them. Repentance is the sure result of the free gift of Christ's goodness, bestowed upon us while we are yet sinners (Romans 5:6; Acts 5:31).

What happens when the sinner responds to this goodness and seeks after the Lord to find Him? He realizes God has not been "far from every one of us." He sees the blessing of the free gift of the Son of God (Acts 3:26). His heart of stone is melted and he opens the door for Christ to come in.

Summary

Revelation 8 points men and women to the great Propitiator of their sins. It inspires us with the hope we have in Christ. It helps us to fall in love with Jesus and accept Him as our personal and eternal Savior. It unveils Christ's great sacrifice, not made for a select few who have already responded to His love, but made for the "whole world" (1 John 2:2).

Christ loved us when we did not love Him; He interceded for us while we were in sin (Romans 5:6-10). While we were separated from Him through impenitence and sin, He did not forsake us. Rather, He interceded for us, that we might have the benefits of the salvation He purchased for us by His infinite sacrifice. Now we are called to do the same for others and thus be ambassadors of Christ to this world (Matthew 5:39-45; 2 Corinthians 5:20).

This is the wonderful picture we find in Revelation 8. This is what it means to be like Christ, to be a Christian. Amen.

Preludes of Hope

The Seven Trumpets

Revelation 8 delivers a picture of salvation unparalleled in all of Scripture. Not that the idea revealed here is not present in other parts of God's Word. It is. In fact, the rest of the Bible enhances the grandeur of this vision, as we will see.

Our study opens with verse 2:

"And I saw the seven angels which stood before God; and to them were given seven trumpets" (Revelation 8:2).

The number seven in the Bible denotes completion or perfection (Genesis 2:1-3). And trumpets are used throughout the Scriptures as a call to preparation for battle or cleansing. For example, trumpets were sounded in the book of Leviticus on the day of atonement, which was a call for the people to prepare their hearts for God's final cleansing from sin.

"Then shalt thou cause the trumpet of the jubilee to sound on the tenth day of the seventh month, in the day of atonement shall ye make the trumpet sound throughout all your land" (Leviticus 25:9).

In the book of Joel the trumpet was again sounded to call all, even those with nursing children, to a solemn assembly in preparation for the day of the Lord.

"Blow ye the trumpet in Zion, and sound an alarm in my holy mountain: let all the inhabitants of the land tremble: for the day of the Lord cometh, for it is nigh at hand" (Joel 2:1).

"Blow the trumpet in Zion, sanctify a fast, call a solemn assembly" (Joel 2:15).

And in 1 Corinthians the apostle Paul signified the use of the trumpet with the call for preparation for the battle, the spiritual battle between good and evil. This scripture reference is very significant for

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our study. It reads: “For if the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself to the battle?” (1 Corinthians 14:8).

The seven trumpets are a call to prepare for the coming of the Lord. They call us to the solemn assembly, to the day of final atonement or sin cleansing. But how do we get ready for the coming of the Lord and how are we cleansed of sin? How do we prepare for the battle? This is the subject of the next few verses. As John sees these seven trumpets given to the seven angels the scene immediately changes: “And another angel came and stood at the altar, having a golden censer; and there was given unto Him much incense, that He should offer it with the prayers of all saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne. And the smoke of the incense, which came with the prayers of the saints, ascended up before God out of the angel’s hand” (Revelation 8:3-4).

That’s it, just two verses. Yet their import is significant because they speak of us specifically. These two verses explain what happens to those words spoken to God called *prayers*. These verses tell of our hopes, wishes, joys, pains, and our every spoken and unspoken call to heaven. And not only do the verses apply to us, who pray to God, they also apply to everyone who does not. In what way?

First, consider the picture for a moment. Somewhere in this world of woe, a sinner’s prayer is uttered. From the dark recesses of a sin-torn mind comes the stammering response to heaven-born love: “Jesus, I accept you as my Savior. I believe you died for my sins so I could be forgiven and be eternally saved. Come into my heart to be the Lord and Savior of my life. Do for me what I cannot do for myself. Save me from sin. In Jesus name. Amen.”

According to Revelation 8, these words are heard in heaven! This prayer is brought right into the very throne room of the King of the universe! Not by its lonesome, though. That is, this prayer is not all by itself in the same state in which it was prayed. The sinner’s prayer is full of corruption, tainted with the iniquity of fallen humanity, with the life-history of sin. It must, therefore, be mingled with “incense” before it is presented to God (verse 4). What is this incense?

“And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given Himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a *sweet-smelling savor*” (Ephesians 5:2).

According to this verse, the incense represents the fragrant essence of Christ’s sacrifice on Calvary. His sacrifice, made once for all sinners, is mingled with the prayers of the saints.

Jesus Christ lived a perfect life of obedience to God (Hebrews 5:8-9). Upon the cross He took upon Himself the sin and guilt of the world (John 1:29). To everyone who accepts Him as Savior, Christ grants complete forgiveness of sin and guilt, and gives, as a gift, His perfect righteousness (1 John 1:9; Romans 5:17, 19). When the prayer of the sinner reaches out to Jesus, it is mingled with the incense of His perfect righteousness. That sinner becomes a saint, holy and blameless in the sight of God.

This is the picture of the gospel presented in Revelation 8. Yet these verses do not deal only with sinners’ prayers for salvation. The incense is needed not only by the newborn sinner, but also by the committed Christian. Even the petitions of those who may have prayed the sinners’ prayer long ago are not brought directly to the Father. Veteran Christians need the incense, too, because they often pray selfish prayers—formal, careless, faithless, lifeless, listless, let’s-get-this-out-of-the-way-so-I-can-get-on-with-other-things prayers.

The point is, whether we are sinner-becoming-saint or saint-still-chief-of-sinners, our prayers do not ascend to the Father until they have been immersed in the blood of Jesus Christ, permeated with His righteousness, and seasoned with the savor of His perfect life and death. The merits of Christ are combined with the deficiencies and imperfections of humanity. Then, presented in the fragrance of Christ’s perfect righteousness, they ascend to the throne of the Father. Wonderful truth!

“We have an altar,” the apostle Paul boldly declares, “whereof they have no right to eat which serve the tabernacle. For the bodies of those beasts, whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high priest for sin, are burned without the camp. Wherefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people with His own blood, suffered without the gate” (Hebrews 13:10-13).

Here Paul is describing the earthly sanctuary as a model of the heavenly sanctuary (Hebrews 8:1-5; 9:1-3). The courtyard “altar” represents the cross where Christ suffered for our sanctification. In the earthly tabernacle, the sacrifices for sin were slain at the altar in the courtyard. These pointed to Jesus, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29). So, Paul explains, the altar where these animals were slain represents the cross where Christ was slain. Calvary is the Christians “altar.”

Revelation 8:3 is describing this “altar.” From this altar “much incense” is taken to mingle with the prayers of those who trust in Jesus. In other words, the altar is the cross and the incense is the merit of Christ offered to us because of the cross. Christ has brought the atoning merits of the cross of

Calvary into heaven for us (Hebrew 4:14-16; 7:24-25; 9:23-24).

Yet Revelation 8:3 brings to view a second altar. This is “the golden altar which was before the throne.” Here the prayers of the saints are offered after they have been mingled with the merits of Christ (verse 4). This golden altar represents Christ’s mediation in heaven for sinners. With Christ as our Advocate, the prayers of sinners, though defiled by the corrupt channels of our humanity, are accepted by the Father. When we surrender our hearts to Christ we are accepted before God even though our lives are imperfect and faulty. Christ is our righteousness. God sees us in Christ, shrouded with His perfection. We are “complete in Him” (Colossians 2:10).

So, as we come to the “altar” of Calvary and accept Christ as our personal Savior, His sacrifice becomes eternally effective. Our prayers, mingled with the sacrifice of Christ and symbolized by the courtyard altar, ascend up to God from the golden altar in the holy place through the mediation of our high priest, Jesus Christ. The adoption of our souls into the heavenly kingdom is now positively acknowledged.

At this point our “in Christ” position moves from simply temporal and temporary to eternal and everlasting. What is meant by our “in Christ” position being temporal and temporary? Consider with me the full context of this vision in Revelation as we look at yet another application of Christ’s sacrificial merits, which applies to sinners in general.

Besides being applied to saints who love God and sinners who have just accepted Christ, the merits of Calvary are applied to the world. This is because the prayers of God’s people ascending to heaven not only embrace forgiveness, to be sure, and a number of other needs, hopes, and desires, but they also embrace our unbelieving neighbors. God calls us to pray for ourselves and for them. Consider these tremendous verses in 1 Timothy 2.

“I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; for kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior; who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; who gave Himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time” (1 Timothy 2:1-6).

Did you catch the full import of these passages? The prayers of the saints ascend to heaven for “all men,” that is, all mankind. Why? Because Jesus Christ gave Himself as “a ransom for all.” He died for all (Hebrews 2:9).