

Some More Thoughts on Intercession

Daniel 9:2-7; 1 John 5:16-17

Sunday, August 2, 2020 at The First Congregational Church of Marshalltown, Iowa

Introduction

Last week I spent some time talking about intercession and felt it warranted a few more thoughts on the subject. Whole books have been written about what Scripture teaches about how to pray and how to pray for other people. We are told specifically to pray for people in authority (1 Timothy 2:1-2) that we have peace in our lives. We are naturally inclined to include family and loved ones in our prayers. Here's some thoughts for praying for the nation and for praying for people.

Praying for the nation

One of the classic passages about intercessory prayer is in the book of Daniel, chapter nine. Daniel, who was a prince of Israel when the nation was overthrown by Babylon is, by this time, an elderly man. By the way, that date commemorating the fall of the first temple in 586 BC (and the second temple as well in 70 AD) is called Tisha B'Av and was Thursday. Jews considering the saddest day of the year. In Daniel 9, the old prophet reads a scroll from the prophet Jeremiah and discovers that the length of the exile of Israel was to be 70 years, and he realized that the 70 years were soon to end. This is a great example to watch someone from the Bible respond to reading the Bible. After reading Jeremiah, Daniel prays for the nation. Notably, he confesses the sins of the nation and consistently uses "we". He prays about national sins as if he had committed them himself, and in doing so gives a great example for people who want to pray for the nations today.

Praying for people

When it comes to praying for people, one of the more helpful passages is in 1 John 5 in which the great apostle writes that we can pray for people, and God will give them life, so in a sense our prayers for one another can be life-giving. The apostle also writes about sins leading to death, and that has caused some consternation as to what they mean. They can vary but are considered very grave and can cause someone to lose their soul if they do not repent. In the context of 1 John, false teachers who manifest the spirit of Antichrist (2:18), who deny the Father and the Son (2:22-23), reveal themselves as "children of the devil" (3:10) and wholly reject Christ (5:12) may be on this list. But I would suggest that if the person is still breathing, keep praying.

blasphemy challenge

This leads me to comment on something that had happened thirteen years ago or so. It was called the "blasphemy challenge", a website (now offline, thought the group that

organized it is still around) in which people who were atheists were encouraged to videotape themselves saying "I blaspheme the Holy Spirit" as a way to come out as atheists. Thousands did so, knowing that blasphemy of the Holy Spirit is the unforgiveable sin in three of the four Gospels (Mark 3:29; Matt 12:32; Luke 12:10) so they maintained that by saying the words "I blaspheme the Holy Spirit" they had committed the unforgiveable sin and forfeited all hope of heaven, thus was they confidence as atheists.

Unfortunately for them, the group issuing this proclamation boldly and confidently displayed their ignorance of the Biblical text, thus making anything they assert questionable because they did not do their homework. "Blaspheme, in the text, is in the present tense. Someone who wants to blaspheme the Holy Spirit has to do it for the rest of their life, and if they ever fail to hold their resolve and dare to repent and ask forgiveness, hell is denied them and they are saved. In reality, the way to blaspheme the Holy Spirit is to reject the Gospel of Jesus until you die. If they're living, keep praying. That is, basically, the application: if they're living, keep praying. It is amazing the extent that some people will live their lives oblivious to the Holy Spirit, and then suddenly wake up as if they have suddenly seen a great light. When praying for someone, ask the Lord to give them life, and let the Lord apply that as He sees fit. People need prayer now more than ever.

Conclusion

The great prophet Daniel, after living in exile for decades, discovered that the years of his peoples' captivity was coming to an end, so he prayed, confessing the sins of the nation as if they were his own, and God honored him for that. The great disciple John, while noting that there are sins that lead to death, did write that when we see someone struggling, we should pray for them that the Lord would give him life. These are just a couple of points to the body of instruction the Scripture gives regarding intercessory prayer, the type of praying that can change the course of peoples' lives.