

Much Prayer Much Blessing, Little Prayer Little Blessing, No Prayer No Blessing

Prayer Talk

By Dr. Alan Cairns

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Faith Free Presbyterian Church

1207 Haywood Road
Greenville, SC 29615

Website: www.faithfpc.org

Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/faith

Now, then, let's read a few verses in 2 Chronicles chapter 26 in some ways one of the most wonderful stories in the Old Testament and in some ways one of the most heart rending stories in the Old Testament.

Then all the people of Judah took Uzziah, who was sixteen years old, and made him king in the room of his father Amaziah. He built Eloth, and restored it to Judah, after that the king slept with his fathers. Sixteen years old was Uzziah when he began to reign, and he reigned fifty and two years in Jerusalem. His mother's name also was Jecoliah of Jerusalem. And he did that which was right in the sight of the LORD, according to all that his father Amaziah did. And he sought God in the days of Zechariah, who had understanding in the visions of God.¹

Let me stop there for a minute, for I am not going to talk about Zechariah at all. But I want you to ponder that some time. Just take a moment to get the text in your mind and then ponder. And when you are alone think a little about it. Zechariah had understanding in the visions of God. Zechariah understood divine revelation. He had a grasp of God's Word. He had a grasp of God's will. He knew how to relate the Word of God to the situation in which he was placed and to the people with whom he came in contact and particularly was that true in his dealings with the young king Uzziah with the result that under the influence of this man who perhaps had very little else that could be said about him, we don't know, but this man who knew God, who knew the mind of God...

"The secret of the LORD is with them that fear him."²

And he knew the secret of the Lord. But under this man's influence upon this young king Uzziah became a king who was mighty in prayer. We need many as Zechariah. When you are praying for the ministers of this church, this is something to pray for them, something to pray for me, something to pray for Mr. Brame, something to pray for Dr.

¹ 2 Chronicles 26:1-5.

² Psalm 25:14.

Barrett and for all our ministers in all the other churches. We need men who can preach, fine. But the world will choke its way to hell on the sermons of preachers if that is all we have. We need men who are like Zechariah who have an understanding in the visions of God, men who are in such personal, vital contact with God that this book is more than a book of marks on a page. They can go beyond the grammar.

Now don't get me wrong. The grammar of Scripture is the key to the interpretation of Scripture. We have got to know what the Bible means by what it says. But there is something so much more than simply being able to do what the scholars call a historical, critical approach to Scripture. There is a knowing of the revelation. There is a knowing of the revealer. There is an awareness of the mind of God. There is an entering in to the very Spirit that informs the Scripture so that as a result people are encouraged to pray. People are infused to pray. People get a message from God.

How often you have heard it prayed in this church, "Save us from sermons and give us a message." That has always got to be the case, not just a message, the message from God.

You have heard me say many a time and this was how Ironside used to say this. He said it to Willie Mullen when Mullen was just a very young preacher. There is a difference between God's truth and God's message. There is a difference. The whole Bible is true. But it is not a matter of indifference which part of the Bible I take as a text on Sunday. That is not a matter of indifference. While the whole Bible is true, the whole Bible is not the message of God for any given occasion. There is a message and Zechariah was a man with an insight into the message. The result of which was to be seen in the life and especially the prayer life of the young king Uzziah.

God make us so many Zechariahs, people who know him. So verse five.

And he sought God in the days of Zechariah, who had understanding in the visions of God: and as long as he sought the LORD, God made him to prosper. And he went forth and warred against the Philistines, and brake down the wall of Gath, and the wall of Jabneh, and the wall of Ashdod, and built cities about Ashdod, and among the Philistines. And God helped him against the Philistines, and against the Arabians that dwelt in Gurbaal, and the Mehunims. And the Ammonites gave gifts to Uzziah: and his name spread abroad even to the entering in of Egypt; for he strengthened himself exceedingly. Moreover Uzziah built towers in Jerusalem at the corner gate, and at the valley gate, and at the turning of the wall, and fortified them. Also he built towers in the desert, and digged many wells: for he had much cattle, both in the low country, and in the plains: husbandmen also, and vine dressers in the mountains, and in Carmel: for he loved husbandry. Moreover Uzziah had an host of fighting men, that went out to war by bands, according to the number of their account by the hand of Jeiel the scribe and Maaseiah the ruler, under the hand of Hananiah, one of the king's captains. The whole number of the chief of the fathers of the mighty men of valour were two thousand and six

hundred. And under their hand was an army, three hundred thousand and seven thousand and five hundred, that made war with mighty power, to help the king against the enemy. And Uzziah prepared for them throughout all the host shields, and spears, and helmets, and habergeons, and bows, and slings to cast stones. And he made in Jerusalem engines, invented by cunning men, to be on the towers and upon the bulwarks, to shoot arrows and great stones withal. And his name spread far abroad; for he was marvellously helped, till he was strong.

But when he was strong, his heart was lifted up to his destruction: for he transgressed against the LORD his God, and went into the temple of the LORD to burn incense upon the altar of incense.³

And for the sake of time we will come down to verse 21. In the meantime he had been smitten with leprosy and he leaves the house of God.

“And Uzziah the king was a leper unto the day of his death, and dwelt in a several house, being a leper; for he was cut off from the house of the LORD.”⁴

Amen. The Lord will add his blessing to the reading of his Word for his name’s sake.

As I was reading the prayer bulletin while, as I have indicated, there are many things to be given thanks for and many things to be praying for, the thing that was most outstanding for me was the challenge that our sister Margaret Russell includes at the end of her report. She herself was greatly moved by reading of the work of James Frazer, not Frasier, mind you, but probably great Uncle James, James Frazer in China. And she gives a quotation from him that I think you would do well to read and to keep by you. We are going to read it together. It is on the back page, the left column and you will see it in quotation marks.

He says, “I am feeling more and more, that is, after all just the prayers of God’s people that call down blessing upon the work, whether they are directly engaged in it or not. Paul may plant and Apollos water, but it is God who gives the increase. And this increase can be brought down from heaven by believing prayer, whether offered in China or in England. We are, as it were, God’s agents used by him to do his work, not ours. We do our part and then can only look to him with others for his blessing. If this is so, then Christians in home can do as much for foreign missions as those actually on the field. I believe it will only be known on the last day how much has been accomplished in missionary work by the prayers of earnest believers at home. And this, surely, is the heart of the problem. Such work does not consist in curio exhibitions, showing slides, interesting reports and so on, good as they may be. These are only the fringe, not the root of the matter. Solid lasting missionary work is done on our knees. What I covet more than anything else is earnest, believing prayer and I write to ask you to continue to put up much prayer for me and the work here in China.”

³ 2 Chronicles 26:5-16.

⁴ 2 Chronicles 26:21.

Miss Judy adds, “Margaret would substitute Kenya for China.”

“What I covet more than anything is earnest, believing prayer and I write to ask you to continue to put up much prayer for me and for the work here.”

I think that that says it all. I was much interested, having read that, to turn almost immediately, certainly very quickly thereafter to 2 Chronicles 26 and the story of Uzziah who was, after all, a mighty man of prayer. And yet in his old age so declining that he was cut off from the house of God.

I think for a true believer, that must have been the most awful epitaph that he could ever have got. And that is his epitaph. He was cut off from the house of God.

I have often thought of King Saul who was not the good man and the great man that Uzziah was. And toward the end of his life Saul went through the motions of prayer, but he could get no hearing and no answer from heaven. He was cut off from the house and from the presence of God.

But I think, if anything, while the impact—I am not talking now about the impact on the nation for Saul, obviously. I think his sin had a greater impact—but I am talking in personal terms. I am talking about the height to which they reached and then the depth to which they fell. I think Uzziah’s is a sadder case even than King Saul’s.

Uzziah sought the Lord. What would you give to have countries today ruled by people who were listening to Zechariahs and who were able to get through to God in prayer? He sought the Lord and as long as he sought the Lord God made him to prosper. And that went on, I believe, for many years. Then for whatever reason pride being at the top of the list Uzziah became used to being strong. He was successful on every front. And he decided that he would invade the priest’s office.

To people today that may not seem such a terrible crime, but remember that office was set apart by God for a very particular purpose. He invaded that office which prefigured the priestly saving person and ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ. This was not just a wrong step and Uzziah, taught by Zechariah, should have known this. It was an attack on the very revealed way of salvation that God had given. Uzziah should have recognized it. But in he went in his headstrong stupidity, marvelously helped until he was strong. And then when he was strong his heart was lifted up to his destruction. The man who used to move heaven by the power of prayer dies a lonely death, cut off from the house of God.

I want you to think of that as we take the words that Margaret has given us in James Frazer to heart and realize the burden that lies upon us to pray.

In what we have read tonight—and I am not going to preach on these three things—but there are three things that we should pay attention to. They introduce us, obviously, to a divine law. And that is that spiritual prosperity rests on the basis of prevailing prayer.

Now we may say ultimately spiritual prosperity rests on the decree of God, in the sovereign purpose of God, in the power of God. That is all very true. And we should never back away from the ultimate sovereignty of God. But I get a little sick when people start using their belief in the sovereignty of God as an excuse for their own sin.

It is true that as to proximate cause and effect, blessing depends on praying. I know that there are some scholarly individuals who have mocked the old saying, but I am happy to dispense with their scholarly inanities and get back to simple truth. I remember as a young fellow Dr. Paisley used to drum this into us. He would come for a gospel mission and before he would ever come to preach, we would have long times, night after night after night of meeting together to pray. And this was drummed into us. Much prayer, much blessing, little prayer, little blessing, no prayer, no blessing. And that is it. And that is the law. That is God's law. You could as soon have a harvest without sowing seed as have God's blessing without prayer. The law that God has settled—and it is true for us as church and it is true for you as an individual—is that prosperity spiritually depends on the basis of genuine believing and prevailing prayer.

And that prosperity that we gain in prayer will affect the work of God in every conceivable way. You will see some things that are listed here that you may want to pay some attention to. Obviously Uzziah prospered in his warfare with the enemy. You see how he went forth and warred against the Philistines and broke down the walls of their cities and was able to build cities among their cities.

You will see the problem of the West Bank and Gaza didn't begin in the 1960s, 70s, 80s and 90s. It was all the way back then. But he prospered in his warfare against the enemy.

Now listen. We are in a battle with an enemy that is more ferocious and fearsome than the Philistines ever were. The cause of Jesus Christ across the world is under attack from militant Islam, from Romanism now dressed up as almost evangelicalism. It is under attack from Humanism. The gospel of Jesus Christ is under attack politically, socially, legislatively. It is under attack from the outside. It is under attack from apostates on the inside. The gospel of Jesus Christ is nowadays under serious and terrible attack. We all know that. You look at what has happened in your own lifetime, unless you are one of the very young and I think even the very young could probably, if they had the wherewithal to do the search, they could trace even what has happened in their few years. But look at your own lifetime and see what has happened in your own nation. And it is incredible. It is utterly beyond belief.

If I had stood up... I remember when I came here in 1980 and I say this as someone who was very generally an admirer of Ronald Reagan. Again, I am not getting into the politics, but I was a very {?} admirer of how he went about things. But I warned that Mr. Reagan simply because of who he was could do things religiously that would undercut what generations of good men had done in this nation.

You may not know all the history and I am not here to give it to you, but if you go back in your own nation's history you will find that following the assassination of Abraham Lincoln this country deliberately broke ties with the Vatican for the very simple reason that the Vatican was embroiled up to its neck in the blood of the murdered president of this country. It is a simple fact of history. No president, not even John F. Kennedy, no president reinstated those relations until the conservative came along whom all the evangelicals were falling down before and he could get it done. And Billy Graham told him if anybody is ever going to be able to do it, of course Graham wanted it done, you are the one to do it.

What I am saying to you is that if you put your trust in princes or in politicians or in presidents, if you put your trust in programs and parties, you are in for a very, very serious disappointment. This nation is falling apart morally, spiritually, not yet economically. That will come of due course, mind you. But it is falling apart. If you want to see how far it can fall spiritually, you go to where I come from. Remember, it was Europe who gave you the gospel. It was Europe who gave the gospel to the world following the Reformation. And yet today it is an absolute desolation.

If you go to London, go to give out a gospel tract, thank the Lord it is not quite as bad as this yet in Northern Ireland, but you go to London and give out a gospel tract and it is not because of the terrorism issue. This was true before I came here. That is almost 25 years ago. And people back away and they wonder: What is this?

Well, it is the story of the gospel. It is about the Lord Jesus Christ.

They don't know what you are talking about.

I have been there and done that. I am not telling you what somebody else told me happened. I have been there, done that and seen it.

That is how far you can fall. When you get to where England is today where in a given year five percent of the population will ever go to any church, when you take out of that the places that are called churches that are no better than entertainment centers or social clubs or dens of apostasy, it is serious and it is sad.

Here and there there is a bright spot. Thank God for that. But that is how far you can fall. The enemy has come in like a flood. The Philistines are prevailing.

Now what is the answer? How do you conduct warfare against the enemies of the gospel of Christ? How do these missionaries ever hope to conduct warfare? I have been reading you from Margaret's support in Africa. When you go across to Africa the first thing that hits you when you go there is just people, people, people. Everywhere there is people. The roads are crammed with walking masses of people. You get out into the countryside. You use these strange little clusters of homes. This is the polygamist's compound. These are where the spiritists worship. These are where the ancestor worshippers are still there. And despite all the years of the influence of the gospel, all

these things are still very, very much in evidence. And Kenya is far from the darkest places on the continent. How are they to battle these things? With money? Well, they can always use your money. But as Frazer puts it here, first and foremost, this work is done on your knees. You get the victory whether here or there when the Church learns to pray. And here is the real reason for the weakness of the Church of Christ. As the enemy has come in like a flood, what has the Church of Christ generally done? We have tried to fight the enemy with the same weapons the enemy uses. And we can never win that way. You will never raise more money than the Hollywood crowd. You will never do it. You will never get people giving countless millions to a Christian propaganda program as some are doing to the extreme left wing causes that hate God and the gospel. You are not going to find that.

But let me remind you what I told you that Dr. Paisley prayed and I never forgot that praying in one of the greatest prayer meetings I was ever in. We were praying for the defeat of a man who seemed beyond being capable of being defeated. But in all the political position and power, influence and money, the parties, the press. All the people who mattered were right behind him. We met to pray that God would deal with him and I never forget that prayer.

And after he had prayed he said to his brethren, "Never let us forget. We have something that they do not have or even understand. We have the ear of God."

And we had. And we got the answer. And that prayer meeting marked the end, or should I say at least the beginning of the end. It came very quickly, of that man's career. That is it. God answers prayer.

Brethren, let me tell you. The law of God is if we are going to prosper in warfare it is because we get through on our knees. Of course, warfare is only part of the problem. There is a lot more to the work of God than fighting the enemies. The major part of the work of the Church is internal. And that is why you will see that he prospered as regards the welfare of his people. And there is a long portion here that tells you of how he built towers and how he dug wells and how he sowed and he reaped. He loved husbandry. He was the king who was a good gardener. I am glad that it's not a prerequisite for being a preacher, but anyway he certainly loved husbandry.

But do you use it all? He prospered. And the country became like a Garden of Eden under this man. Then you read of all the inventions. It was the golden age for Israel, for Judah. It was a golden age. Men of genius were stirred up and their genius was put to a good cause and it was all because God made him to prosper. He was marvelously helped. Now that is the divine law. He prayed. He prospered. He prayed. He prospered.

This is not some charismatic delusion about you say this after me or send me your money and you will become a millionaire. Being a millionaire is not necessarily prospering. That may be the thing to ruin you and damn your family. I know one of the rich men in Ireland. At least I knew him and he left multiplied tens of millions of dollars behind him

to wreck and ruin a family who would have been far better off having to go out and earn their keep by the sweat of their brow.

So what the charismatics talk about as being so much prosperity may actually be a curse. There is something much, much better. God will meet your need. He will meet your need. In the way he sees fit for his glory and for your good, but in the things that really matter, in the defense, the towers to defend the country, to defend the Church, to defend your family, you need to see some towers built in your home around your children. You need to dig wells of the water of life, of the refreshing fullness of the spirit of God. You need to have a sowing and a reaping, a planting and a harvest in the home and in the church.

How do we get these things? You get them on your knees. That is the divine law.

And I have already talked too long, so I better run over the others two things and finish with them. There is obviously in the worlds as long as he sought the Lord. There is a distinct limitation here. God blesses you as long as you pray. In other words, God is not going to be blessing this church tomorrow because it was praying 10 years ago. The level of our prosperity and the enjoyment of what we have in Christ depends on where we are today in the place of prayer. Here is the limitation of the blessing. God has so tied his blessing into the praying of his people that when the praying stops the blessing stops. When the praying declines the blessing declines.

That is a very serious thing for you in your own life and for me in my life. And it is a very serious thing for us as a church. We need to take this very, very much to heart. Where are we in our experience of God in prayer?

I think it is always a mistake to hark back to the good old days, except to encourage us to cry out to God for better days. No good living in the past. But yet there is no good either being fools and being like the proverbial ostrich and hiding our head in the sand.

I am going to say what a minister really should be very careful about saying. But I am going to say it. And I hope you will take it as I mean it and I hope that it will spur your heart. But I do not believe that as a church we are where we were 10 years ago in the place of prayer. I don't believe we are. Do you?

We can come up with every excuse in the world. As long as he sought the Lord he prospered. This is going to be the crux of the ministry of this church for all the years that God gives us. It doesn't depend ultimately—now I not trying to get the preachers off the hook here, but it doesn't depend ultimately on the brilliance of the preachers or the dullness of the preachers. It doesn't depend ultimately on the attractiveness or otherwise of their personality. It depends ultimately on whether we get through to God.

As long as he sought the Lord and no longer, did God prosper him. That is the limitation.

When you get to the end of the story at the end of verse 15 and into verse 16 and then that final statement that I read in verse 21 you have a drastic lesson. He was marvelously helped until he was strong and then when he thought he didn't need to be as strict anymore he wasn't as strict. He didn't need to pray. He had made it. He didn't need to pray the way he used to pray.

See, I think—and I don't think I am reading too much into the Scripture here—I think Uzziah had lost out in prayer before he ever invaded the priest's office. If I am any judge of human nature, Uzziah entered into the priest's office trying to do something physically to make up for a lack that he already felt spiritually. He had already lost out with God in the place of prayer. His heart had already been lifted up. He didn't need to pray the way he used to pray. He had money enough. He had armies enough. He had leaders enough. He was successful in every hand. Why did he need to be on his face crying? He would be like a man who had all the grain in the world, all the bread, all the fruit, all the meat and he is on his face and he is crying, "Give us today our daily bread." Didn't make sense to his proud heart.

But, you know, you have got all the beef and all the bread and all the grain, you still need to pray for your daily bread. You still need to pray for it.

What a lesson for us. Never forget the source of your strength. Never forget it. Never stray from being absolutely sold out to seeking God's face. For I want to tell you. You are not one bit better or stronger than Uzziah and neither am I. And I want to tell you. It is as absolutely certain as that the sun will rise tomorrow morning. If you fail to seek God, you will fall as far and as drastically as ever Uzziah fell. Never let us stray from our fidelity to Christ. That is the whole meaning of going in, laying his hand on the priesthood. And the big thing here is never allow self to assert itself. Self confidence, self dependence, never let self assert itself or insert itself in any way to draw us off for an absolute dependence upon God.

We need to pray. You look at this prayer sheet. Isn't there much to pray for? Isn't there a need? Don't our missionaries need us to get through to God on their behalf? Well, then let us pray.

Now I have talked too long, but then what is new about that? But I believe that the Lord has been with us and I believe it is important that we get the Word.

We are going to seek the Lord's face in prayer. Now this is a missionary prayer meeting. And while it is certainly in place to pray for the Lord's presence with us on the sabbath day and the blessing of God and while it is in place to pray about many other things the Lord may bring to mind, for I am not the conscience, yet let me remind you there is a missionary prayer meeting and you have a host of requests there. Let's lift them up. Remember Margaret speaks for them all when she quotes James Frazer and says, "What I am asking from you most of all is, brethren, pray for us."

So let's pray.

Now we can't pray for everything. Even together tonight we are not going to be able to get through every single request on this sheet in the time available to us. That is why you take it home with you. But we can start.

Now I am going to be very strict tonight. I am going to limit you to praying for two things. I am talking about you, not everybody, just you praying for two things. Ok? Don't preach God any sermons, just pray for two things.