

For the past several weeks we've been engaged in a topical study on Church Life. This life takes three directions: it looks up (in worship), within (in edification), and without (in evangelism). We come this morning to the fourth sermon on the second of these, to various activities, designed by God, to edify His people.

Thus far we've seen confrontation and forgiveness, Christian forbearance, and the use of spiritual gifts. This brings us this morning to the broad and important topic of intercessory prayer. By "intercessory" is meant "prayer offered on behalf of others." Scripture exhorts us to intercede on behalf of our enemies, those in authority, and the brethren, but it's this latter aspect of intercessory prayer that is my focus this morning. Simply put, Christians are to pray for one another.

But before I come to v6 and the theme of intercessory prayer, I want to say one final thing by way of introduction. Psalms 120-134 all have the title "A Song of Ascents" and the reason being, these were sung as worshippers ascended to Jerusalem. Three times a year all of Israel had to ascend to Jerusalem to collectively worship God in His Temple.

Thus, they would sing these Psalms as they went up to Jerusalem in preparation for worship, and as we shall see, they not only sang about Jerusalem but they prayed for Jerusalem, that the peace of God would reign within her walls.

- I. The Object of Intercessory Prayer
- II. The Nature of Intercessory Prayer
- III. The Motive of Intercessory Prayer

I. The Object of Intercessory Prayer

1. By "object" I refer to those we are to pray for—"Pray for the peace of Jerusalem"—Jerusalem is the object of intercessory prayer.
2. Now you know, within the OC, Jerusalem was the capital of God's kingdom on earth and home of His unique presence in the temple.
3. This is why God and the people of God loved Jerusalem—they loved it because God and His people dwelt there.
4. Thus, it was never about the actual, physical city of Jerusalem—it was never about the bricks and stones.
5. David exhorts the people of God to pray for the peace of Jerusalem, or for the peace of those who dwelt in Jerusalem.
6. V8—"For the sake of my brethren and companions, I will now say, 'Peace be within you'"—that is, he's praying the people of God.
7. Thus, when David says "pray for the peace of Jerusalem" by "Jerusalem is meant "his brethren and companions."
8. This is why he wanted prayers to be offered for peace, because he loved Jerusalem (or the people of God).
9. Ps.137:5-6—"If I forget you, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget its skill! If I do not remember you, let my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth—if I do not exalt Jerusalem above my chief joy."
10. This is why he desired that prayers be offered for Jerusalem, because he loved the inhabitants of Jerusalem
11. Now, as you all know, the NT everywhere describes the church as the New and Heavenly Jerusalem.

12. Thus, the principle of Ps.122:6 for NT Christians is obvious—we too are to pray for the peace of the church.
13. Just as the OC people of God were to pray for peace upon Jerusalem, so we are to pray for God's peace to rest upon the New Jerusalem.
14. Or, just as the OC people of God were to pray for peace upon God's people, so the NC people of God is to pray for peace upon God's people.
15. This is illustrated in the NT, in that the apostles pray for grace, mercy, and peace to be upon the church.
16. Gal.6:16—"And as many as walk according to this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, even the Israel of God."
17. A primary point of Galatians is to identify what exactly renders someone a true descendent of Abraham.
18. False teachers were suggesting that Gentiles needed to be circumcised in order to become covenant members.
19. In contrast to this, Paul makes very clear that faith and faith alone renders someone a child of Abraham.
20. He ends the book with this statement—"And as many as walk according to this rule"—that is, the rule that faith alone makes you a son of God.
21. He describes such people as "the Israel of God," that is, "the true Israel of God"—the true seed of Abraham.
22. He then prays for peace and mercy to rest upon them—he basically prays for peace to rest upon Jerusalem.
23. Thus, Psalm 122:6 says nothing about modern-day physical Jerusalem—it simply refers to God's people.
24. Now, should we pray that peace would come to the Middle-East? Yes, just as we should pray for every other part of the world.
25. But this is not what Psalm 122:6 means—David exhorts God's people, of all time, to pray for the peace of God's people.

II. The Nature of Intercessory Prayer

1. By "nature of intercessory prayer"—I refer to the "content" of our prayers—what are we to pray for?
2. David makes very clear what we are to pray for—"Pray for the peace of Jerusalem"—we are to pray for peace.
3. The Hebrew word is *shalom*—the word is very pregnant with meaning and contains a number of related concepts.
4. The word fundamentally entails "completeness" "wholeness" or "soundness"—to be complete or whole.
5. He uses two closely related words in the context that shed light upon this term—"prosper" (v6) and "prosperity" (v7).
6. While the Hebrew words rendered "prosper" and "prosperity" are slightly different words, they are almost synonymous.
7. In short, we are to pray for the prosperity of Jerusalem—we are to pray the church prospers or flourishes.
8. The name Jerusalem literally means "foundation of peace" and actually contains the Hebrew word *shalom*.
9. Jerusalem is the city of peace as it's built upon the Prince of Peace, has peace with God, and enjoys the peace of God.

10. Thus, to pray for the peace of God is merely to pray that the church would enjoy more fully what they have.
11. The church has peace with God (objectively) and enjoys the peace of God (subjectively)—this is a fact.
12. Thus, to pray for the peace of Jerusalem, is to pray that the church of God would increasingly know that peace (to be specific, we must pray for the collective and individual peace of Jerusalem).
13. (1) Pray for the collective peace of the church—"Pray for the peace of Jerusalem"—the collective people of God.
14. Verses 7-8—"Peace be within your walls, prosperity within your palaces. For the sake of my brethren and companions, I will now say, 'Peace be within you.'"
15. Thus, by praying for the collective peace of the church I mean—we should pray for the church as a whole.
16. This can be illustrated throughout the NT, in that Paul often reminds the churches that he's praying for them.
17. Eph. 1:15-15—"Therefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, do not cease to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers."
18. Thus, to be more specific—in praying for the collective peace of Jerusalem we pray for its unity, safety, and growth.
19. (a) Pray for its unity—that is, that peace and unity would rule within the church with all its differences.
20. Thus, the NT exhorts us—"to endeavor to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Eph.4:2)."
21. Brethren, many of us have been Christians for a longtime and have been members of many churches.
22. And many of us, can tell horror stories of churches destroying themselves over strife and contention.
23. I was speaking to a fellow pastor last week, and he asked how the church was going—I gave him my generic response.
24. "The Church is overall fine, but pray for us, for as you know, disunity and discord are just beneath the surface."
25. Peace and unity can quickly disappear—one-minute things seem fine and the next everyone is at each other's throats.
26. (b) Pray for its safety—here I'm thinking more about enemies from without (as opposed to enemies within).
27. The city of Jerusalem was surrounded by enemies—it was a city that resided in the midst of hostility.
28. Thus, to pray for the peace of Jerusalem is to pray that Jerusalem would be kept safe from all her enemies.
29. Now, the world seeks to corrupt the church in two ways—first, by persecution, and second, by influence.
30. In other words, if the world cannot destroy the church by hate it seeks to destroy it by influencing its thinking.
31. While there are many ways this can happen, they all entail an erosion of confidence in holy Scripture.
32. (c) Pray for its growth—here I'm thinking about the overall spiritual health and growth of the church.
33. Pray that sinners would be saved and saints edified—pray the church would grow numerically and spiritually.

34. (2) Pray for the individual peace of the church—"Pray for the peace of Jerusalem"—the individual members of the church.
 35. Remember, the church can be viewed as a collective whole and as individuals who comprise that whole.
 36. Again, we learn this here in Psalm 122—"Pray for the peace of Jerusalem...for the sake of my brethren and companions."
 37. In other words, we are to pray for the peace of Jerusalem (collectively) and for the sake of our brethren (individually).
 38. (a) Pray for their physical good—for those who are sick, with child, in need of spouses, and proper employment.
 39. Matt.6:9-11—"Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as in heaven. Give us our daily bread."
 40. One thing that's often overlooked in this prayer, is the plural pronouns—"Our Father...Give us our daily bread...forgive us our debts...lead us...deliver us."
 41. In other words, our Savior understood that His people would pray for others and not merely for themselves.
 42. (b) Pray for their spiritual good—that is, pray that each member would have this peace within the walls of their soul.
 43. Now, one way to learn how to pray for each other is to study the many prayers found in the NT Scriptures.
 44. Eph.3:14-19—"For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, etc."
 45. Let me first admit, that Paul offered this prayer on behalf of the entire church and not merely individuals.
 46. But, if he offered this pray on behalf of the entire Ephesian church, then it's far to suggest, he meant it for each member of that church.
 47. Paul prayed for the entire family of God—some of this family is presently in heaven and some on earth.
 48. Beginning with v16, we have three "purpose of clauses" which begin with the word "that"—these constitute a threefold prayer.
 49. (i) Strength from Christ, v16—"that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man."
 50. (ii) Fellowship with Christ, v17—"that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith"—this refers to intimacy.
 51. Christ already dwells in the hearts of His people by His Spirit—Paul prays that they would enjoy this.
 52. (iii) Knowledge of Christ's love, v17—"that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height—to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge that you may be filled with all the fullness of God."
 53. This prayer concerns our assurance of Christ's love for us—that they would be assured Christ loved them.
 54. Thus, we must pray for the peace of Jerusalem—both its collective peace as well as its individual peace.
1. Now before I leave this second main heading, I want to provide four helps to assist you in intercessory prayer.
 2. Help 1—Pray regularly—by this I mean, incorporate some schedule to pray repeatedly for the church.

3. Col.4:12—"Epaphras, who is one of you, a bondservant of Christ, greets you, always laboring fervently for you in prayers, that you may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God."
4. Epaphras was likely the minister of the church at Colosse—at present he was visiting the apostle Paul.
5. This man serves as a pattern for intercessory prayer—Paul describes the frequency and intensity of his prayers.
6. It's the first of these that I'm here after—"always laboring fervently for you in prayers"—he always prayed for them.
7. How often do you pray for the peace of Jerusalem? We pray for ourselves and families, but do we pray for our church?
8. One the best ways to regularly pray for the church is to set aside a specific time each week or day to do so.
9. For example, take 5 or 6 families a week, and spend a few minutes a day praying for each of the families.
10. On Mondays you pray for the Waters family, on Tuesday's you pray for the Stauffer family, on Wednesdays you pray for the Wright family.
11. And then on the next week, who choose 5 or 6 different families and you pray for them during that week.
12. This way, if you think about, you can pray for every family in this church over the course of a single month.
13. Now, there's a number of ways you can do this—but here's the important point—be consistent and organized.
14. I've prayed for this church enough that I can, in my mind, move through all the families in the church.
15. In my mind I simply pray for those who sit on the far left, middle left, middle right, and then far right.
16. That's because I have the privilege of standing before you, for you, you may have to use the church directory.
17. Help 2—Pray specifically—by this I mean, we must pray for specific people and for specific needs (issues).
18. Now, in order for this to take place there needs to be an openness and transparency between members.
19. Simply put, how are we to pray for each other's needs, unless we have some knowledge of those needs.
20. Jas.5:16—"Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The hard-working prayer of a righteous man avails much."
21. Notice how James weds together "confession" and "intercession"—"confess your sins and pray for each other."
22. This necessarily implies, some measure of intimacy and transparency—sharing our needs with others.
23. Brethren, we mustn't merely pray in general, but we must pray for specific people and specific needs.
24. Help 3—Pray affectionately—by this I mean, intercessory prayer should be driven by love for others.
25. This is at the very heart of intercessory prayer—pleading with God that His blessing falls upon others.
26. Intercessory prayer is one of the clearest displays of love—love seeks the good and prosperity of others.

27. At its core, intercessory prayer is one person pleading with God for the physical and spiritual good of others.
28. What if you owned a massive warehouse that contained every physical and spiritual blessing known to man?
29. Wouldn't you give to those you love every necessary blessing? Since you love them you want them to prosper.
30. Well brethren, most of us have very little to give—we may have a few physical blessings but we have no spiritual blessings to give.
31. But here's the point—God alone is the owner of this warehouse—He alone owns the cattle on a thousand hilltops.
32. And it's within intercessory prayer, we each have the privilege of asking God that He would bless others.
33. Brethren, why do we pray for our spouses, children, parents, pastors, and brethren, but because we love them.
34. We pray for them because we desire God's blessing to rest upon them—we desire the peace of God to dwell within them.
35. You know if you think about it, Christians have two fundamental jobs—talk to others about God and talk to God about others.
36. This of course is clearly illustrated in the office of pastor, who must give himself to preaching (speaking to others about God) and praying (speaking to God about others).
37. This can be illustrated in the OC High Priest, who bore the names of the 12 tribes upon his heart before God.
38. Richard Sibbes—"As the priest carried the tribes on his breast, only to signify that he had them in his heart, so in some sense, every true Christian is a priest. He must carry the church and people of God in his heart. He must have a care of others. He must not only pray for himself, but for others."
39. Phil.1:8-9—"For God is my witness, how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus. And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more."
40. Because he loved them, he prayed for them—or, his prayers for them were expressions of love for them.
41. Help 4—Pray sympathetically—by this I mean, we must feel the burden and weight of those we pray for.
42. Again, this is true of all prayer—true prayer is coming before God, burdened, to make known our needs.
43. Well, if this is true of generic prayer for ourselves, it's also true of intercessory prayer offered for others.
44. Now, here I want to illustrate this point with the example of Christ—Christ makes intercession for us.
45. Rom.8:34—"Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us."
46. But remember, there are two important aspects of Christ's intercessory prayer—merit and sympathy.
47. Put another way—there's something very unique about Christ's intercession for us—He pleads His merit for us.
48. Obviously, when we pray for others, we don't plead our own merit, but instead the merit of Jesus Christ.
49. But there several similarities between our intercessory for others and Christ's intercessory prayer for us.

50. And the primary one is this—Christ prays for us with a knowledge of our weakness and our neediness.
51. Heb.4:15—"For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin."
52. This goes back to the OC, and the fact that the High Priest had to be selected from among the people.
53. This allowed the priest to sympathize with the people he represented—he interceded with compassion.
54. With regards to OC priests, they could sympathize with the weaknesses and sinfulness of the people.
55. With regards to Christ, though He cannot sympathize with our sinfulness He can sympathize with our weakness.
56. This is one primary reason behind the incarnation—the Son of God assumed a human nature to become a sympathetic High Priest.
57. Our beloved Savior, our NC High Priest, intercedes for His people fully aware of their needs and struggles.
58. And this is exactly how we are to pray for others—we are to pray for them aware of their weaknesses.
59. But not merely intellectually aware, but we need to bear them up, as it were—carry them before God.

III. The Motive of Intercessory Prayer

1. David provides three closely related reasons (motives) for intercessory prayer—love for ourselves, others, and God.
2. (1) Love for ourselves (v6)—here I have to begin with an important clarification—Scripture nowhere tells us to love ourselves.
3. We are told to love God with all our heart, and our neighbor as we love ourselves—self-love is presupposed.
4. One of the many problems of our day is the fixation on self-love—it's in every way contrary to Scripture.
5. And yet, there is a qualified sense in which love for ourselves is a proper incentive for intercessory prayer.
6. V6—"Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: May they prosper who love you"—those who love Jerusalem pray for her, and those who pray for her will prosper.
7. Here's the point! In praying for the peace of Jerusalem we will of necessity prosper and be blessed by God.
8. Why? First, because we are a part of Jerusalem, and secondly, because God blesses those who bless His people.
9. (2) Love for others, v8—"For the sake of my brethren and companions, I will no way, 'Peace be within you.'"
10. The reason David himself committed to pray for Jerusalem, was because he wanted Jerusalem to prosper.
11. (3) Love for God, v9—"Because of the house of the LORD our God I will seek your God (the good of Jerusalem)."
12. In other words, David sought the good of Jerusalem (by intercessory prayer) because God dwells there.
13. This is simply another way of saying—the reason I love Jerusalem is because I love the God of Jerusalem.

14. Brethren, those who have no or little love for the church, have no or little love for Christ—they go together.
15. Put another way—the reason we love the church is because we love Christ, who dwells in the church.