

LOVE OF INTERCESSION
Series: "Christ in the School of Prayer"
Exodus 32: 1-14 February 14, 2016
The Church of the Covenant

In Lent this year we will explore together deepening our spiritual and prayer life by focusing on some of the great "pray-ers" of the Old and New Testament. Specifically, we will focus on Jesus Christ as the greatest "pray-er" ever and will learn from Him. We will learn from Jesus what it is to pray and we will learn of Jesus as we pray—So it will be "*Christ in the School of Prayer*". This first sermon in the series focuses on the Old Testament patriarch, Moses, and his intercession on behalf of his people, Israel.

We probably remember the story. Moses is up on the mountaintop about to come down with the two tablets of the law, the Ten Commandments. But down in the valley the people have grown impatient. They grow restless. Mischief grows in a spiritual vacuum. They ask Aaron, Moses' brother, to fashion a golden calf that they can bow down and worship. People apart from God in prayer always fall away and indulge in idolatry. Humanity likes to worship and serve gods it fashions with its own hands. Remember the old Simon and Garfunkle song, *Sounds of Silence*, with the line in it—"And the people bowed and prayed to the neon gods they made." "No prayer", limited and lifeless prayer, disconnects people from God and the next step is that people begin to love and serve idols of their own making --sports idols, gods of success, The Power Ball, politicians and movie stars, the desires of our own heart. How many hours a week do we watch television and how many minutes a week do we pray? How often do we FACEBOOK and how often do we pray and speak to God? What if that were reversed and we prayed more than we watched television and we were connected more to God than the Internet? What kind of better world would there be????

But then the people not only fashion a golden calf and worship it, they then ascribe to it, inconceivably, their success and blessing. They have just been saved by passing through the Red Sea by God's miraculous and mighty hand. They have just been brought out of slavery in Egypt, just escaped by God's power, out of the wrath of Pharaoh. They have been fed manna in the desert. They have been led by a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. And what is the very next thing they do? They give this golden calf the credit for their blessing and favor—They say of the golden calf they have made of their own hands, "*These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!*" (Exodus 32: 4) And God hears this from heaven, even as He is giving Moses the law. He hears the prayers being offered to other gods from the people He has just saved and redeemed and brought out of bondage. God hates idolatry; His first commandment to us is "*Thou shalt have no other gods before me.*" God quotes to Moses the people's prayers to the neon gods they have made—"These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you out of the land of Egypt!" (Exodus 32: 8) What an offense to God! What a slap in the face! What idolatry most foul to give anything or anyone credit for what God has done in our lives! No, no, no—WHO has brought you up out of the land of Egypt? That is to whom our prayer, our love, our life is to be directed. God purposes then to kindle His wrath against His own people.

So Moses intercedes on behalf of his people. He speaks to God on their behalf. "Lord, why would You do bad things to your people whom You just saved?" "Lord, if You blot them out from the face of the earth the Egyptians will mock You and what You have done." Remember the good people, the faithful remnant, those who did not turn away. "Lord, remember Your promise, "*I will multiply your descendants as the stars of heaven...*" (v. 13) and how can You keep Your promise, Lord, if Your people are all dead?" Lord, as Moses prayed in Exodus, "*Turn from your fierce wrath and repent of this evil against thy people.*" (Exodus 32: 13) And then an amazing thing happens. Then, as it says, "*And the Lord*

repented..." (Exodus 32: 14) God changed His mind. God withheld His hand of judgment. Moses prayed and God changed His mind. Moses' intercessory prayer changed things. Moses' prayer prompted God's action. If you really understand what just happened here you will understand why each of us should have a love of prayer and specifically a love of intercessory prayer, like Moses.

Most of us will remember our dear Associate Pastor, Randy Boyer, and his love of intercessory prayer. He started the healing service here many years ago. Out of his efforts we have re-founded this through our Covenant Prayer Summit that meets next on Sunday evening, February 21st at 6:00 p.m. in our Covenant Center. More than 60 people chose to pray, opposite the Super Bowl on February 7th. I suspect God heard those prayers. Over the course of the healing service that Randy began there were times where more than 100 people would show up to pray. We prayed for many things. But we also were praying for Randy. Because our dear Associate Pastor had many years before been diagnosed with cancer. We gathered together to pray that God would spare the life of Randy, would allow him to continue in ministry, would allow him to speak the words on his heart into the hearts of others. But then Randy passed away in February, four years ago. So did God not hear our prayers? Somehow did we not pray enough or correctly and that's why Randy passed away? Was there something we as his family did not do and that is why Randy passed away? We prayed and we interceded. There have been few prayers over the course of my ministry that I have prayed more earnestly or diligently or desperately than those I prayed for Randy. And for a time, after he passed away, my prayer life was silenced, and I grew mute in the presence of God. When it feels like God does not hear nor answer our prayer, then it can still our desire to pray.

But the Lord has shown me over the past four years these things. Randy lived longer than anyone else in the United States with this particular disease. Why is that? The drug that he took that kept the cancer in check was effective for almost four years longer than anyone else in the nation. Why is that? He outlived everyone else in his test group. Why is that? I remember seeing him with his head cap on, to cover the tumors on his head, walking by the Family Promise House, in his black trenchcoat, carrying his oxygen tank, on a church work day the October before he passed away. How could he do that? Where did he get his strength? I remember him in hospice care tapping out the memo that tells us how to do the mission budget, a process we still use to this day. How could he do that? He was sent home from Hospice Care because he was doing too well. Why? I remember the last healing service he officiated at, in November before he passed away, and I remember him coming to my office afterward and standing in the doorway, and I remember that his eyes shined, and it was almost as if his skin glowed. It was like when Moses entered into the presence of God and he had to cover his face because the experience in the presence of God caused his face to be aglow with the Spirit. Why did that happen? Our church still prays together and we still support Family Promise. Why is that? And I still, when I meet someone new in Washington and tell them I am from The Church of the Covenant, and they get the same faraway look on their face and they ask, "Isn't that the church where the heroic associate pastor fought cancer?" Yes, it is. And, by the way, I now add, we are the heroic church family that prayed for him to have God's strength to do precisely that! Four years later and Randy's faith is still preaching. You think that isn't an answer to prayer? A miracle? Maybe not the exact one we all prayed for and wanted. But do you think this all happened randomly? Or did God intervene? Did God's mercy turn to Randy because of our love of intercession for him????????? I know what my answer is. I know which God I worship and pray to.

Jesus often would go up on a mountaintop or to a quiet place set apart and would pray. Well, if He was the Son of God, and He is, why would He do this? He was God; He IS God. Why does God need to pray to God? If everything is already laid out in advance and God knows and controls everything already then

why would Jesus even bother to pray? Why did He pray so earnestly, so desperately, for us? Why did the Son of God so often intercede on our behalf? **Because prayer changes things.** Prayer changes things on earth. Prayer changes things in heaven. Prayer is the greatest weapon for GOOD that we have in this life. Prayer moves humanity's heart. Prayer moves the heart of God. The more we pray the more God hears and the more God hears the more God intercedes, and the more God intervenes, the better the world becomes. Jesus loved to pray. Jesus loves to intercede for us on our behalf. Jesus is teaching us as His disciples what it is to pray. Jesus is teaching us how important prayer is. Jesus is the professor of prayer and we are His students. And as we pray, not only do things change, but we discover HIM. It is Christ in the School of Prayer.

I leave you with one last thought today. Jesus did intercede for us on our behalf. And Jesus DOES intercede for us on our behalf. He IS the "*mediator*" between God and humanity. (I Timothy 2: 5) He was the "Pray-er" extraordinaire, above all others and He STILL IS the "Pray-er" above all others. In His lifetime on earth He prayed for us. And now as He reigns in heaven HE STILL PRAYS for us. He has the ear of the Almighty for He sits to His right hand. Our SAVIOR, the one who saves us, the one who brings us out of slavery in whatever Egypt we find ourselves, the One who forgives our every golden calf, the One who DID the miraculous and the One who DOES the miraculous, still is praying for His people, for us, for you and for me, constantly, earnestly, desperately pouring out His prayers and His heart for us before the throne of grace and mercy of His Father in heaven.

When we pray, and when JESUS the Son of God prays for us, do you think things aren't going to change for the better? *Prayer has the POWER to change life.* Amen and Amen.

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IF THIS HAS BLESSED YOU, PLEASE PASS IT ALONG TO A FRIEND!**