

## ***Prayer of Adoration***

Psalm 57

Summer Sermon Series on Prayer

Kenwood Baptist Church

Pastor David Palmer

June 15, 2014

**TEXT:** Psalm 57:1-11

This morning we start our new summer series on prayer. The Lord has laid on my heart for us to grow stronger in our life of prayer, and we will look at prayer in Scripture, at examples of God's people praying in both the Old and New Testaments. When we think of prayer, I want us to



think of the many different settings or scenes of prayer.



In this beautiful collage, we see images of prayer happening both at Kenwood and through the ministry of Kenwood. In each of the images, you can see prayer happening. In the sanctuary, we see prayer of consecration, being set apart for missions; we see pictures of people being prayed for

as they come to this church through local outreaches or in the context of a worship service. In our local outreach in downtown Cincinnati, we see people being prayed for in a group praying at the Lord's Gym. Through our global missions, we see people in the Nightlight Mission in Thailand praying either to receive Christ or to be ministered to.

As we think of prayer, we come to the question: "Do we really need to learn to pray?" I want to start the series with that question. Sometimes it seems contradictory to us. We imagine that either our heart is so overflowing that prayer just happens by itself, or we say prayer is something that is just not for me. Yet in Scripture, the disciples asked Jesus: "Teach us to pray." In this summer series, we want to hear that question and the answer from our Lord: "Teach us to pray." How do we learn to pray? The best way I know to learn to pray is to pray through and with those praying in Scripture. I've been taught to pray by godly men and women, and yet the most enduring source for the model of prayers is by seeing people praying in Scripture. There are hundreds of prayers in the Bible itself, and these prayers give us language and license and the shape of our prayer life. We will alternate back and forth over the course of the summer between the Old and New Testaments, praying together with God's people as we learn to pray

different kinds of prayers.

This morning, we begin with a prayer of adoration. In my opinion, this is the first and the greatest of all prayers. It is the prayer that God would be exalted, that He would be great in the world and great in our own lives. It is consonant with our Lord Jesus' instruction that the first thing for us to pray for is that God's name would be hallowed, holy, exalted in the earth. This prayer of adoration is our soul's center of gravity. It should be our most consistent prayer that God would be exalted. Our text this morning is Psalm 57. The prayer in this Psalm is brought forward twice by David under circumstances of great distress. Psalm 57:5 will be our memory verse for the summer:

*“Be exalted, O God, above the heavens; let Your glory be over all the earth.”*

I want this verse to be your most frequent prayer this summer as we journey through this Psalm both as a prayer of David and as an instructive example for us in the context of the prayer of adoration. This prayer of adoration is uttered in the depths of distress, and it is uttered again on the other side of God's great activity on David's behalf. The context of Psalm 57 begins with instructions to the worship pastor, for the director of music, to the Hebrew tune *al-tashchet*, which means *do not destroy*. It's a Psalm of David, a *miktam*, although scholars are not entirely sure exactly what this means, perhaps a type of song. The occasion is when David is fleeing for his life, being pursued by King Saul. It is a prayer that comes forth from a time of great affliction and testing and trial. The narrative background can be read in 1 Samuel 22 through 24. David is being pursued; Saul is chasing him; he is fleeing for his life; he is together with several hundred men; and he is hiding in caves. The king of the land is pursuing, and this is certain death.

We enter now into the language of this Psalm. There are three movements in Psalm 57. The first movement of the Psalm is a soul's seeking mercy from God, taking refuge in God. From the first movement of Psalm 57, we learn that God is our refuge, that He is our hiding place. Psalm 57:1 begins with a plea:

*“Have mercy on me, O God, have mercy on me, for in You my soul takes refuge.”*

David repeats this plea for God to be merciful to him. If God is not merciful and kind to us, we will perish in our distress. We get a sense of the urgency of David's plight in that this plea is rendered twice: “Have mercy on me, O God; have mercy on me. I am hiding literally in You. My soul takes refuge in You. The world is swirling around me.” Notice that David runs straight to God. This is the first lesson: tuning the strings of your heart for the great prayer for God to be exalted. When you are in distress, ask for God's mercy and help and move toward God, not away from Him. Some of you are tempted when distress and affliction comes to step back from God. This is the worst thing you can do. David models for us that we rush toward God in

affliction and trial. In the second half of Psalm 57:1, David says:

“I will take refuge in the shadow of Your wings until the disaster has passed.”

The image of the shadow of God's wings is an image of God's divine presence, the protective canopy of God hovering over us.

The Bible begins with an image of God's hovering presence, the Spirit of God hovering over the waters. When Ezekiel sees God's holy presence in chapter 1, God's presence comes down in a beautiful, elaborate, mobile, divine throne. God journeys through the heavens, rushes to the aid of His people. Ezekiel says that at the bottom of the throne there were wheels that turned in every direction and heavenly creatures with wings as God's overshadowing presence. Isn't it fantastic that the presence of God would be a protective shield or canopy over you, that nothing could break through the divine defenses! David says in this Psalm: “I am hiding, O God, under the protective shelter of Your wings.” God will not abandon us, but will protect and defend us. David says: “Underneath the protective shadow of Your wings, I am crying out to You, God most High.” “To God,” the NIV says, “who fulfills His purpose for me.” Literally it says in the Hebrew: “I'm crying out to the God who acts on my behalf.” I love that for myself, and I believe that for you. I know that is true because of prayers that I have prayed for many of you to the God most High, the One with all the real power in the universe, the One who in covenant acts on our behalf. He doesn't just have the power, He has the power and He delights to use the power for your good, for your protection, for your strengthening. Therefore, it is right to seek refuge in God, to hide under His protective canopy. He is the one who acts on our behalf. In Psalm 57:3, David says that God is the One who:

*“ . . . sends from heaven and saves me, rebuking those who hotly pursue me. Selah ”*

As you live this life, the first movement of Psalm 57 teaches us in our distress to look straight to God, nowhere else, for all of His power is ready to be engaged on our behalf. David says: “He will send forth from heaven and save me, and He will rebuke those hotly pursuing me.” God will stop those pursuing David. David is fleeing; the king is on his trail with the king's armed men, and David says: “God will stop them. He will act on my behalf.” Then there's this little word *Selah*. Scholars really don't know what it means, though there are lots of theories. It could be a musical note. Some scholars think it means to repeat this section. It is a type of marker indicating a break in the stanza or verse of the song, and so we pause when we see that word. In movement one, David is in distress; he pleads to God for mercy and help, for all of the resources of heaven to be engaged on his behalf; and he looks straight to the God who can save. Where are you looking this morning? Are you looking to God first and foremost for help? This is what we learn to pray from the first movement of Psalm 57.

The second movement of Psalm 57 is the prayer that in our distress God would be exalted and His glory fill the earth. David says in Psalm 57:3b-4:

*“God will send His love and His faithfulness. I am in the midst of lions; I lie among ravenous beasts—men whose teeth are spears and arrows, whose tongues are sharp swords.”*

There were lots of lions in the ancient Near East and in ancient Israel. Lions were eliminated from this area during the Roman period when lions were used extensively for gladiatorial contests. That is why there aren't a lot of lions there now, but in ancient Near East, there were lots of lions, and David says: “I'm lying down in the midst of lions.” It could be literal lions, but it could be metaphorical lions. Metaphorical lions are people, and it is possible that David is referring to the surrounding band of people pursuing his life. Notice that he is at a very low point. He is hiding in a cave with 400 men, and he's praying that his life would be spared. He says: “I'm lying down here, at night, in a cave, and I am surrounded by enemies.” I've never heard a lion yell in the wild, but I've been told that it's scary, especially if you're in a tent! David is in a cave, and he is surrounded by enemies. He is low, and he needs help. He says: “They have sharp teeth and sharp swords,” and in the midst of this low point is our first hearing of this great prayer.

Then this great prayer erupts from a dark cave: “Be exalted, O God, above the heavens, and let Your glory be over all the earth!” How do you pray that in a dark cave, fleeing for your life? You pray that when you believe that the answer to your plight is in God's arising and manifesting His power and glory in the world. David lifts his soul, as it were, up high and says: “Oh God, be exalted above the heavens. I'm in this dark cave fleeing for my life, and would You make a name for Yourself?” What happens to us when we pray this prayer: “Be exalted, O God”? What happens to us is that we receive strength from the pursuit of God's glory. The narratives of 1 Samuel tell us often that David strengthened himself in the Lord. How do you strengthen yourself in God? You strengthen yourself in God by seeking God's glory in every situation. David is low, and he prays a lofty, high prayer to God. I believe that Psalm 57, in this second movement, teaches us an extremely important lesson of prayer. That lesson is that we become strong and stable when we pursue God's glory above all things, seek God's glory in all the earth as a priority above and beyond our own immediate answers to prayer for our specific needs. This was the spiritual secret of many who have gone before us.

George Mueller is one of my heroes of faith, and he was a man of deep prayer. George Mueller was used by God to start a number of orphanages in England, and at one point he was responsible for feeding 10,000 children every day. That is a big responsibility. George Mueller wrote about his life of prayer, and he said that the key for him is to keep our souls happy in the Lord. Mueller says:

“Other things may press upon you. The Lord’s work may have an urgent claim on your attention, but it is of supreme and paramount importance to seek above all things for your soul to be happy in God Himself, day by day seek to make this the most important business of your life. This is been my firm and settled condition for the last 35 years. For the first four years after my conversion I knew not its vast importance, but now, after much experience, I commend this point to all my brothers and sisters in Christ: the secret of true effectual service is joy in God and having experimental acquaintance and fellowship with God Himself.”

The first prayer of Mueller's devotional life was the glory of God, to take delight in God and God's manifestation of His power in the world. Notice that what happens to us is that we become stronger when we seek God's great fame.

David experiences an answer to his prayer in Psalm 57:6. It’s a great reversal. The God of Scripture often exalts the humble and humbles the exalted. In this verse, David tells of the answer to this prayer being realized. He says:

*“They spread a net for my feet—I was bowed down in distress. They dug a pit in my path—but they have fallen into it themselves. Selah”*

The God of Scripture delights to act in this way. He confounds our enemies; He overturns those who seek our ill; and He acts on our behalf. Notice that it is deep within a dark cave when David says: “Be exalted, O God, above the heavens; let Your glory be over all the earth.” God responds, and those pursuing David's life fall into the pit that they dug for him. Then we see that word again, *Selah*. That's a verse worth repeating; sing that course again.

We move on to the third movement of Psalm 57. The Psalmist then bursts forth into praise and adoration. Look at the language of worship in Psalm 57:7. David says:

*“My heart is steadfast, O God, my heart is steadfast; I will sing and make music.”*

David said his heart is steadfast or fixed, established. It’s the opposite now of being in distress or being anxious; it is the opposite situation of panic. “My soul is at rest. My heart, Lord, is now steadfast; it is established; it is like the foundations of the earth, rock solid. God has answered my prayer. So, what will I do?” David says: “I will sing, and I will make music.” David bursts into praise and adoration. In Psalm 57:8, he stirs himself and summons himself to praise with all the resources at his disposal. He says:

*“Awake, my soul! Awake, harp and lyre! I will awaken the dawn.”*

God has answered, and David rouses himself to praise. He bursts forth into praise now as an evangelist in Psalm 57:9:

*"I will praise You, O Lord, among the nations; I will sing of You among the peoples."*

This is the passage that Paul quotes in Romans 15:8. David extols the Lord in Psalm 57:10:

*"For great is Your love, reaching to the heavens; Your faithfulness reaches to the skies."*

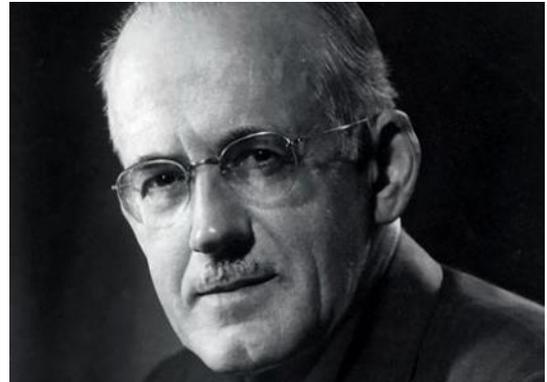
David comes back to the central prayer again in Psalm 57:11:

*"Be exalted, O God, above the heavens; let Your glory be over all the earth."*

This is a lot easier to pray in verse eleven than it is in verse five. When David praises in verse five, he's in the dark cave surrounded by enemies, unsure if he will see the dawn. When he praises in verse eleven, God has rescued him, and now he's saying: "Give me the microphone. I want to tell everyone what God has done in my life." But the lesson is that the prayer is valid in the cave and in the noonday sun. This prayer, "Be exalted, God, above the heavens; let Your glory, Lord, fill the earth," is the first and greatest prayer of a believing heart, when you are in distress, and when you are fresh on the other side of God's great victory on your behalf. Don't just pray this prayer in the verse eleven moments in your life, but also in the verse five moments.

By way of conclusion, I want to introduce you to someone who has made a big impact on my own spiritual life, though I've never met him personally. A. W. Tozer was an American pastor from Ohio, pastored in Chicago, and later in Canada.

Tozer wrote over 40 books, and these books focus on our life of devotion. I really encourage you to read his most famous book, *The Pursuit of God*. It is written in very accessible language. God gave Tozer a great gift of speaking deep truths in very plain language. He is a gifted communicator and someone who is headed straight for God above all things. Those are the best friends to have, people who will carry you along with them, heading straight for God.



In one of the chapters of *The Pursuit of God* is a sustained reflection on this verse: *"Be exalted, O God, above the heavens; let Your glory be over all the earth."* Tozer says:

"In determining relationships we must begin somewhere. There must be somewhere a fixed center against which everything else is measured, where the law of relativity does not enter.

"As the sailor locates his position on the sea by 'shooting' the sun, so we may get our moral bearings by looking at God. We must begin with God.

"We can get a right start only by accepting God as He is and learning to love Him for what He

is. As we go on to know Him better, we shall find it a source of unspeakable joy that God is just what He is. Some of the most rapturous moments we know will be those we spend in reverent admiration of the Godhead.

“So let us begin with God. Back of all, above all, before all is God; first in sequential order, above in rank and station, exalted in dignity and honor.

“The pursuit of God will embrace the labor of bringing our total personality into conformity to His. I speak of a voluntary exalting of God to His proper station over us and a willing surrender of our whole being to the place of worshipful submission.

“The moment we make up our minds that we are going on with this determination to exalt God over all we step out of the world’s parade. We shall find ourselves out of adjustment to the ways of the world, and increasingly so as we make progress in the holy way. We shall acquire a new viewpoint; a new and different psychology will be formed within us; a new power will begin to surprise us by its upsurgings and its outgoings.”

This will happen to you, I promise you. If you pray regularly for God to be exalted, you will find a new resource of power for godly living rising up within you, and it won't stay inside of you. It will rise up within you and then it will move out of you. You will find yourself in new situations and places praying: “God, be exalted; let Your glory fill all the earth.” Tozer goes on to say:

“Be thou exalted, O God’ is the language of victorious spiritual experience. It is a little key to unlock the door to great treasures of grace. It is central in the life of God in the soul. Let the seeking man reach a place where life and lips join to say continually ‘Be thou exalted O God; let Your glory fill the earth.’”

God must have the center of our lives, and the prayer that He would be exalted must be our first and greatest prayer. Before we come to God with our petitions, we come to God first through “Hallowed be Thy name.” As we pray “God be exalted,” we are changed, new power rises within us and moves through us. As we begin anew to rededicate ourselves to a life of prayer, make this your first and greatest and most continual prayer: “Be exalted, O God, above the heavens; let Your glory be over all the earth.”

Let us pray. O Lord God, be exalted this morning over our possessions. Let nothing of earth's treasure seem so dear to us except that You are glorified in our life. Be exalted, O God, over our friendships, and let us determine that You shall be above all. Be exalted, O God, above our comfort, though it mean the loss of bodily comfort or carrying of a heavy cross, let us keep our vow before You today. Be exalted, O God, above our reputation. Make it our holy ambition to please You, even if as a result we sink into obscurity and our names are as in a dream. Arise, O Lord, into Your proper place of honor. Be exalted, O God, in my life, in my family, and in my work; in my money, above my ambitions, above my likes, and dislikes; above my health, and

above my life. Lord, be exalted above the heavens; let Your glory fill all the earth. Lord, give us the joy of seeing You made known, and, O Lord, let us decrease, that You may increase. Let us sink down, that You might rise. Ride forth, God of glory, and let the children cry "Hosanna in the highest!" O Lord, we give You glory and praise.

In Jesus name, Amen.