

THE INTERCESSOR
EXODUS 32:9-14
EXODUS 32:30-34

NEED: INTERCESSORS

PROPOSITION: MOSES IS A WORTHY EXAMPLE OF AN INTERCESSOR.

OBJECTIVE: TO ENCOURAGE BELIEVERS TO ENTER IN THE
MINISTRY OF INTERCESSION.

INTRODUCTION:

An intercessor is one who stands in the presence of God and makes requests on behalf of another. Moses is one of the most notable examples of an intercessor in all of scripture.

He stood before God on behalf of his people of Israel on a regular bases. The most memorable recorded experience of him standing before God on behalf of the people happened during the moral crisis at Mt. Sinai. When the people had forgotten the goodness of the Lord and entered in to flagrant sins they put the life of the whole nation in jeopardy. Their transgression against the Lord so provoked the Lord that He was inclined to destroy them as a nation. It was Moses who saved the day. He did not save the day by exercising his administrative skills, even though they were massive. He did not save the day by bringing to them some eloquent message from God, even though he was capable of doing this. Rather, he saved the day by personally standing before God as an intercessor on behalf of the sinful nation. His intercession saved the nation of Israel from death while it was being born.

Almost everyone agrees that we live in times of moral crisis. It is a time of moral crisis for our nation, for our communities, for our families, for our denomination, and for our

church. It is the kind of time that demands some intercessors. I want us to study the intercessory work of Moses as he stood before God under the shadow of Mt. Sinai. We can learn much about the work of intercession by studying how this intercessor went about his work.

I. INTERCESSION IS A WORK OF PASSION

Moses was a passionate man. By this I mean that he loved and felt deeply. Even though he can be tough when the times demanded toughness, he also had the capacity to love and to care deeply.

What we read about in this inspired chapter is a man working out of his passions.

1. A passion for God.

When God disclosed to Moses what was happening at the foot of the mountain and that His intention was to destroy the nation, the response of Moses was immediate. "But Moses sought the favor of the Lord His God." Actually, God had offered to make Moses a nation. He had said to Moses, "Now leave me alone so that my anger may burn against them and that I may destroy them. Then I will make you into a great nation." Many men would have grabbed this opportunity. Who could ask for more? It was an opportunity to have his own nation, one bearing his name and not the name of Israel. Moses had a love in his heart for the Lord that would not allow him to grab that opportunity.

Listen to the prayer he prayed, "O Lord, why should your anger burn against your people, whom you brought out of Egypt with a great and mighty hand? Why should the

Egyptians say, 'It was with evil intent that He brought them out to kill them in the mountains and to wipe them off the face of the earth?' Turn from your furious anger; relent and do not bring disaster on your people." It is of interest that the first concern of Moses was with the reputation of God. He did not want the reputation of God to be spoiled before the Egyptians. He had been on an intimate basis with God long enough that he was concerned about God's reputation and God keeping his promise.

This is basic in the life of an intercessor. More than anything else, the intercessor has a passion for God. It is interesting that Jesus put the passion for God as being first in the disciple's prayer that we are taught to pray. The first concern in the Lord's Prayer is with the Lord's name and kingdom and will. There is to be a love and passion for the Lord God Himself in the heart of the intercessor.

2. A passion for others.

The passion of love for the people of Israel is prominent in these intercessory prayers. It could be said that this passion of love is surprising. These people about whom he cares so much have given him a hard time ever since he went back to Egypt. They have accused him, ridiculed him, and been generally uncooperative with him from day one. It might have appeared to be an opportunity to be rid of these people at last. Instead, he saw them not as just the wayward people that they were, but he also saw them as the people of God. They were his brothers and sisters in a covenant with God. Because of this he cared so much that he immediately went into the presence of God to seek grace for them. There is no way you can overstate the passion and the love of Moses for his people.

This goes with the work of intercession. The only people who will become great in intercession are those who care deeply. If you care only about yourself and pray only for yourself you will never know the joy of the work of intercession. The intercessor moves up to a new level of compassion and love for others. It was unthinkable to Moses that he could watch the people of Israel perish under the judgment of God and do nothing. The only thing that was available to him to do was to lovingly stand in the presence of God and to plead their case. Surely, it must be unthinkable that we can stand impassionately by and watch this generation perish because of its tragic choices. Do we not care enough to seek the face of God on their behalf? It is reported that John Welch kept his coat by his bedside at night. In the middle of the night he would fall to his knees, wrap the coat around his shoulders, and begin to weep and pray. His wife would say to him, "Honey, you had better get your rest. You have work to do tomorrow." Old John Welch would answer, "Woman, I have many souls at my charge and I know not how it is with their souls." Oh, how he cared!

David Brainard, a missionary to the American Indians, said, "I love to be alone in my cottage where I can spend much time in prayer." In his journal he left such an impressive record of intercession, earnest intercession for the Indians of the American frontier. He cared so much and so deeply that he literally used up his life in a few years. Most of that life was used up on his knees, sometimes out in the snow in the cold of winter, interceding for the Indians. His example became a flame that lit the way for men like

William Carey who became the father of the modern mission movement. Intercession is a work of passion.

II. INTERCESSION IS A WORK OF BOLDNESS.

In the inspired record of the intercessions of Moses we find an example of boldness. After he had confronted the people concerning the golden calf and had rebuked Aaron for his compromising behavior, then Moses set himself to seek the Lord. It is one of the most moving examples of intercession found in all of literature. We can learn from it.

1. Bold confession.

The inspired record reads, "The next day Moses said to the people, "You have committed a great sin. But now I go up to the Lord; behold perhaps I can make atonement for your sin." So, the next day found Moses climbing up to the top of Mt. Sinai again.

When Moses arrived at the top of the mountain, he made his prayer to the Lord. The first thing in his prayer was a bold confession of the sin of his people: "O, what a great sin these people have committed! They have made themselves gods of gold." There was no attempt on the part of Moses to explain away what the people had done. He recognized and confessed before God that the sin was great. God knew the sin was great and it was appropriate that God would hear Moses agreeing with Him in his solemn judgment upon the sin.

You will find examples of such bold confession throughout the scriptures. When Daniel laid intercession before the Lord during the Persian period, he made such a bold confession of the sins of his people. It is another great intercessory prayer found in the scriptures. We can learn from this. When we stand before God on behalf of our nation, our community, our denomination, our church, or some individual that we love, it is appropriate that we acknowledge to God the sins that have been committed and the greatness of those sins. A part of intercession is bold confession before the Lord.

2. Bold petitions

What do you pray for when you stand before God on behalf of someone who has sinned terribly against Him? Moses prayed for mercy and for forgiveness. In the first petition before God he prayed, "Turn from your furious anger; relent and do not bring disaster on your people." Here is a man speaking to Holy God. He boldly ask the judge of all the earth to set aside a just decision. God would surely have been justified in completely destroying that immoral, idolatrous group that was playing on the plains around Sinai. Moses asked Him to relent!

In the second experience of intercession on behalf of the people, he prayed, "But now please forgive their sin-but if not, then blot me out of the book you have written."

This particular petition before God has intrigued the people of God throughout the ages. We understand the part of the petition that asks God to forgive. The word forgive has in it the idea of lifting up and carrying away. It is a request that God will set aside the transgression of the people. But what about the part of the petition in which He lays His

own life on the line? What does it mean for God to blot him out of the book? Some understand this to be simply a petition that if it was necessary he was willing to die so that the people might be forgiven. It simply requests death. Others, including myself, go a step beyond that. You will remember that Moses indicated that he was going to see if he could make atonement for the sins of his people. I would understand that Moses was offering himself to be an atoning sacrifice for the sins of the people and that this included his name being blotted out of the book of life. He cared so much that he was offering to go to hell, under go the terrible judgment of God, so that his people might be forgiven. What a bold petition! Obviously, God did not take him up on this offer. His life could not serve as an atoning sacrifice for he, too, was a sinner. It wasn't until Jesus came that there was one who could serve as an atoning sacrifice for the sins of Israel and the sins of the world. What a bold petition!

This is the way of intercessory prayer. Intercessors have a way of asking God to do things that others wouldn't even imagine asking. Their passion for God and their passion for others will force them to lay before God bold petitions.

How bold are you in your petitions for others? In your petitions for your church? In your petitions for our denomination? In your petitions for our nation? Why don't we take up the burden of intercession and become bold in our petitions before God?

III. INTERCESSION IS A WORK WITH PREVAILING POWER.

Never underestimate the power of an intercessor on her knees. They can literally turn the course of history. These prayers of Moses are a reminder to us of the prevailing power of intercessory prayer.

1. Prevailing power with God.

The prayer of Moses literally saved the day for the nation of Israel. The inspired record states it plainly, "Then the Lord relented and did not bring on His people the disaster He had threatened." The older version translates *relented* as "*repented*." The basic idea is that He changed His mind. Moses was so persuasive in standing before God and appealing on behalf of his people that he persuaded God to withhold his hand of judgment.

Does this mean that God is fickle? Is He constantly changing His mind on the basis of the prayers of His people? We best keep in balance the great truths that are revealed about God in the Bible. I prefer to believe that when God shared with Moses what He would be justified in doing in destroying the nation of Israel, it was a loving invitation for Moses to become an intercessor on the part of his people. God did not have to share with Moses what He was inclined to do. He could have done it without consultation with Moses or anyone else - He is God! When God shares with His servant His intentions of judgment, it is an invitation for his servant to become an intercessor. And from our earthly perspective it appears to us that God changed His mind. We would be wise to remember that it is an example of the persuasive power of an intercessor with a gracious and merciful God of this universe. "The effectual, fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much."

2. Prevailing power for others.

Who benefited from the prayers of Moses? The people he loved! They probably never fully understood just how much they owed to Moses. If it had not been for the bold, earnest appeal of their leader before Holy God, they would have been destroyed. They lived on to serve God in another day because Moses stood before God on their behalf.

There is no way we will ever know fully how much difference intercessory prayers have made in the activity of God and in the life of the people of God in history. During the days of the II World War there was a company of intercessors at a Bible College in Great Britain that were led by Rees Howells. Mr. Howell shared about one such experience of intercessory prayer by his group. It involved the battle for Salerno. It was one of the decisive battles on the Italian front in World War Two.

2. In the battle for Italy, Salerno was a real danger point.

Allied troops landed there in September, 1943, to seize this strategic location and thus prepare for the invading forces to reach Rome. This is an eye witness account of Howell's activities that night: "We had the first evening prayer meeting as usual in the conference hall and gathered again at 9:45 pm. The meeting had a solemn tone from the outset. The director, Mr. Howell's voice trembling with the burden of his message and scarcely audible, said, 'The Lord has burdened me between the meetings with the invasion at Salerno. I believe our men are in great danger of losing their hold.'"

Howell then called the congregation of Bible students to prayer. It was an extraordinary time of prayer. The prayers were intense and urgent. Howell further related, "The Spirit took hold of us and suddenly broke right through in the prayers and we found ourselves praising and rejoicing, believing that God had heard and answered. We could not go on praying any longer so we rose-the Spirit witnessing in all of our hearts that God had wrought some miraculous intervention at Italy. The victory was so outstanding that I looked at the clock as we rose to sing. It was the stroke of 11 pm."

Several days later one of the local newspapers displayed a headline in large print, "THE MIRACLE OF SALERNO." A reporter who had been an eyewitness to the invasion at Salerno gave his personal account of the battle. He was with the group on the front line that Monday evening. The enemy was coming toward them rapidly and working devastation on every side. It was obvious that without a miracle, the city would fall and all would be lost. The British troops had insufficient strength to stop the advance until the beachhead was established. Suddenly, with no reason, the firing ceased and death-like stillness settled. The reporter describes the next few moments, "We waited in breathless anticipation, but nothing happened. I looked at my watch-it was 11 o'clock at night. Still we waited, but still nothing happened; and nothing happened all night, but those hours made all the difference to the invasion. By morning the beachhead was established. "

Heaven knew what was going on that night! Some intercessors were exercising their authority before the God of the universe on behalf of the army of Great Britain and God

heard. When we get to heaven we will discover that stories like this have been repeated again and again.

Charles Finney was one of the most effective evangelists that has ever lived on the American continent. What many people do not know about Mr. Finney's effective ministry was that "Father" Nash covered his ministry with prayer. This elderly man would precede Finney to the cities where he was scheduled to conduct crusades. Three or four weeks in advance of the meetings he would find a quiet place and begin to intercede for the revival that was to come through the ministry of Finney. During the revivals, there would be victory after victory and every eye was focused on Mr. Finney, the evangelist. But actually when we get to heaven we will probably discover that it was the bended knees of Father Nash who made the difference. Every Finney needs a Father Nash! Every church needs some intercessors! Every community needs some intercessors! Every nation needs some intercessors! Would you ask God to give you the privilege of being such an intercessor?