

Prayer in a time of crisis

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 01 January 2000

Preacher: Rev James Maciver

[0 : 00] To Exodus chapter 33. Exodus chapter 33 and we're looking at the prayer of Moses here particularly as we find it in verses 11 down to 13.

And Moses besought the Lord his God and said Lord why did thy wrath wax hot against thy people which thou hast brought forth out of the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand and so on.

Now let me just mention the main elements that have taken place, main events that have taken place from the time that we last looked at our studies of Moses.

We looked in chapter 17 at Moses how he was upheld by Aaron and Hur when they were engaging the Amalekites.

And since then in the chapters intervening up to this point we read that the people had come to Mount Sinai where God had come down in great power on Mount Sinai so that the mountain itself quaked and was on fire with the presence of God as he came down to visit the people.

[1 : 25] And many of the chapters that we have from 19 down to here up to 32 are taken up with God speaking to Moses of the not only the ten commandments and the other commandments that he gave to the people, the various laws that he gave to them.

But we also find the details that he gave to Moses concerning the building of the tabernacle. And these things were given to Moses particularly as he spent this time with God up on the Mount.

The people were not allowed to come into this place where Moses went in into the cloud where God himself was particularly present.

And it was during that time that Moses was receiving these various instructions from God that this event took place that we find in chapter 32.

Where the people began to show them in chapter 32 where the people began to show their impatience and what was in their hearts and where they came to pressurize Aaron really into this idolatrous incident.

[2 : 39] Now it was an incident which the people of Israel would look back on many a time in their history, particularly the men that God sent to them at the times of decline in their lives.

When God sent these men in the prophets and the times of the psalmist and so on, they very often spoke of this incident. It was left in the memory of the people as a shameful and disgraceful incident.

And it was something that was significant. And not only for the fact that it was a time of breaking out of idolatry and a departure, as God himself put it, quickly out of the way which he commanded them.

But it's significant also for the aftermath, for the prayer of Moses that was set out before God, as the psalmist put it, Moses standing in the breach.

Moses coming to God, praying for the people, not only that, but Moses, as we find at the end of the chapter, willing even to have his own life taken as a substitute for the life of the people.

[3 : 53] What a wonderful emphasis that is. Not only in terms of what Moses himself was as a man of God, but how we find it there as an intimation or a type of the Son of God, of Christ himself.

Not only in interceding for his people, but in standing in the breach, the life of the just for the unjust. But our concern just now is with this prayer of Moses.

Now in order to understand this prayer, we have to look briefly, first of all, at what leads up to it. And therefore we're looking first of all at the impatient demands of the people.

And then secondly we're looking at the importunate prayer of Moses, the man of God. The impatient demands of the people. Followed by the importunate prayer of Moses.

Now you notice as we look at the first of these that we see, it is spoken of very clearly in our passage in the chapter, the reason why the event that we have here took place.

[5 : 05] When the people saw that Moses delayed to come down out of the mountain, the people gathered themselves together unto Aaron and said unto him, Up, make us gods which shall go before us.

For as for this Moses, the man that brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we want not, we do not know what has become of him. Forty days, forty nights we know that Moses was in the crowd with God.

He would spend another forty days and forty nights with him when he was given the second set of tables of the law, having broken the first. These times, these forty days, these forty nights, not a very long time, but this is the impatience of the people.

They have come to the point where they say, Look here, this Moses, we don't know what's happened to this man who has led us out of Egypt, who has brought us to this place. How soon they forgot who really was the leader that had brought them out of Egypt.

Not just Moses, but the gods of Moses. How soon they forgot the mighty things that they had seen. That gods have fallen in the land of Egypt. We don't know what's happened to this Moses.

[6 : 21] Take us out of here. Bring gods to us. Make us gods who shall go before us. We don't want any more this emphasis on this invisible God. We want things that we can see.

We want gods that will go before us, that we can see visibly before our eye. gods that we know will lead us without delay, without others waiting about it.

And you see, that is the impatience of the people. But as we've said all along, and as we will continue to see, these are things which are so relevant for our own day and for our own hearts.

They are relevant because these very factors and these very principles that we're seeing in these great passages are directly applicable to you and to me today.

What is it that we find in the impatience of the people? In what leads to this necessity of prayer by Moses on their behalf? Well it is this for one thing.

[7 : 23] You can see here something which is true of you and of me today in the sinfulness of our own hearts. We can put it this way, that this is really graphically a demonstration of what sin has done to us.

What sin has done to you and to me. Here are people at a time when they should be patient, when they should be waiting upon the Lord, when they should wait for Moses to come from God to them with the message of God on his lips.

And they are impatient, they can't wait. They would rather have God that they could see, that they could touch, that they could handle and fashion for themselves. They would rather go their own way.

They would rather engage in a hasty action rather than wait upon God for a few more hours, a few more days. Isn't that where you see sin as well?

When God tells us, it is a time for you to speak to me, a time to wait, a time to consult with me, a time to wait in such a manner that I would come to bless my word to you, to speak to you from my word.

[8 : 42] But we're so impatient. We want to go our own way. We're so impatient because we think that the way ahead is as we would have it planned, as we would execute.

Or put it the other way. Because you see the principle of sin, the effect of sin, working in the very opposite direction as well. Not only when God tells us, wait a while, do we find our sinfulness when we say, well, we're impatient.

We can't wait that long. But when God says, hurry up. When God says, don't wait a moment longer, what do we do?

We're dying. We delay. We waste time. We pass the opportunities away. What is that? That is sin. That is our sinful heart.

That is what sin has done to us. That is what sin has done. That is what we are. That is what we are looking at. We are exposing ourselves, our inmost being, by these various kernels that we find in this passage.

[9 : 47] This is the evidence of our own heart. Here we are today. And either or both of these is applicable directly to us here and now.

God is saying to us, there are times when you must room for me. There are times when you must consult me. There are times when you must spend time in my presence and wait until I have spoken to you.

There are times when I will say to you, come to me. Don't wait a moment longer.

When God will have us bring our sins to him without delay. When God will have us come to the cross of Jesus without delay. When God will have us to avail ourselves of the abundance of mercy and of grace and of life that there is in the Savior who offers himself.

Is God saying about that? Look here. Delay. Spend some more time considering this issue. Is God telling us that? Of course he is. Everything God does and everything God says in whatever way he says is for you's good and for my good.

[11 : 02] So that whenever he says there has to be a time of waiting upon him when the way ahead is not clear to us when we have to seek his will from the scriptures for ourselves or for our church, for our denomination, for our congregation whatever it is that is for our good.

You remember Jesus at the time of the death of Lazarus he was sent a message from Lazarus' bereaved sister Mary and Martha to come immediately to them that their brother was sick and he delayed and he delayed deliberately and he showed his disciples as he would later speak to the women themselves he showed his disciples that he knew that the delay was necessary for them for their faith for their relation to him.

The sisters had said Lord if thou had been here my brother had not died. But Jesus you see knew what the situation required they were looking at it from their point of view they were looking at it in their particular wisdom but God was saying this is how it must be at this time God never ever says in his word that we have to consider the sorrow of sin so as to be laid coming to him for forgiveness coming to him for salvation indeed the whole emphasis in the word of God consistently throughout it is an emphasis upon the very opposite fact that God would say to us now is the day of salvation that God would say to us as Jesus put it in the parable in Luke of the man who said to himself soul eat drink soul thou hast laid up many goods for many years and God said to him you fool tonight your soul shall be required of you what is that saying to us it is saying to us this that whether God tells us that the delay is necessary or whether God tells us that immediacy is necessary our sinful hearts will go in the opposite direction that is what we are made of that is what God is saying to us you have to deal with that natural bias of the heart so that whether it resists a time of delay or resists a matter of immediacy and coming without delay to him it is our own heart that we must look to we must find grace from God to deal with the problem so that what God in his way sets out for our benefit we will avail ourselves of so that is the first thing that he is saying he is evidencing the evidence that we have here is the evidence of what sin has done to us that here is indeed the very opposite to God's demands and God's emphasis but the second thing is important as well that there is an emphasis here on the fact that it was the gods of Egypt that they were seeking to set before them you see it's important that we realize the significance of the fact that it was a golden calf that they made the word in Hebrew really means a young bull it was that similitude or shape of a young bull that the hand of Aaron particularly fashioned for the people and the significant thing about that is that the bull was a particular religious symbol in the idolatry of Egypt we find it also in the Canaanite religion in the religion of Baal worship later on but it was also significant in Egypt and it seems that what the people are demanding here is the kind of thing you see that they had left behind or that they had known of in Egypt and that is the principle that is so important for you and for me today when we ask the question what really was behind that impatience you see the impatience itself is not the real root cause of this the problem is deeper than that the root cause of this is the thing that they had known of in Egypt that they now desire again to go back to and to have in their possession and to have as a replacement for the Moses and the God that Moses spoke to them about

in other words it was their desire for the things of Egypt for the gods of Egypt that led to their idolatry here let's put that into words that will be applicable to ourselves it is the remnant of Egypt that particularly leads them at this time into impatience and idolatry that is the principle that you and I must reckon with in our own lives speaking of all those who are believers who are saved at this point that is what we are emphasizing at this point that it is in the heart of these believers that the Bible tells us there is a principle at work that resists and indeed wars against the very thing that God has created in our hearts the light and the very spirit of God that occupies that heart what are we saying?

it is this that every single instance of departure from God there is one thing responsible for it in the experience of a believer and it is this it is this principle of remaining of remnant of indwelling sin that is a supremely important point always to remember why is it important?

[17 : 35] because we cannot deal with the issue as if it was superficial we cannot deal with the matter as if we have enough in dealing with the symptoms of it without really getting to the root of it the Bible tells us again and again especially in the New Testament that there is this terrible thing still in existence in the heart of the believing people of God which they must contend with which they must wrestle with which they must indeed overcome and put to death by the grace of God and by the spirit of God because it is a powerful thing it is an operative thing it is a thing that is directly counter to the ways of God and the desires indeed that God has brought to life in the soul how does the Bible put it?

well you remember Paul's words because it is Paul that speaks of it more than any other New Testament writer the spirit the flesh lustre against the spirit and the spirit against the flesh and these are contrary the one to the other so that you cannot do the things that you want now you see the apostle is not saying that he himself has not been set free from sin he is not saying that he is not united to Christ he is not saying that he is outside that position where he is saved where he is justified where he possesses the spirit of God but he is still saying there is this element this principle this power still remaining in him that puts him in a position where he is at war with the very things that he wants to do how does he put it in Romans chapter 7 where we believe he is setting out there the very same emphasis in a way that shows how there is one against the other in his heart still he is aware of this warfare this constant battle to which he must apply himself for which he must seek the grace of God each day where he says oh wretched man that I am the good that I would

I do not the evil that I would not that I do I delight in the law of God in the utmost part but I find another law in my memory warring against the law of the spirit the law of scripture the law of God warring against this law warring against this principle of life there is that ongoing energy that is to be expended in the matter of this warfare that is why it is so important that is why it is so important that we realize that all that brings us aside from the things of God but all that brings us away from that approach to him from that service from that holiness of life from that emphasis it is all down to this it is our greatest enemy the principle of indwelling of sin that still remains in our heart

I'm sure do you say our greatest enemy is Satan our greatest enemy is the devil the devious one the subtle one the ingenious strategies the wiles of the devil doesn't Paul say that we have to weigh the armor of God so that we may resist the wiles of the devil so that we may be able to stand against him yes Paul mentions the devil Peter mentions the devil but Paul does not mention the devil as frequently as he mentions the bias of our own hearts the evil of our own hearts the remnant sin of our own hearts the battle that must be engaged within our own hearts the overcoming of sin within our own hearts that is why he emphasizes it so often that is why the very fact of this punishment that God brought to the people at this time was so serious this you see was really what stood in the way of the progress it was not something by the way not something superficial it was at the very heart of their existence and their relation to God it stood in the way of their success against the other enemies that they would have to fight against it stood in the way of their progress towards that land that God had promised them it was really a huge stumbling block it had to be dealt with at its root and if you trace through the Bible that same emphasis that is what it comes to if you says Paul in Romans 8 if you through the spirit do mortify the deeds of the body you shall live what does he mean by mortify not to mortify something is purely and simply to put it out of being to cure it to put it to death the deeds of the body the remnant of Egypt the remaining sin that is in your heart and mind as a justified believer here today whoever it is however advanced on the way we are however much we may even say with Paul that we rejoice in the things of God he never suggests for one moment a relaxing against this terrible thing of this remaining sin that he finds in the heart of every believer oh wretched man that I am who shall deliver me from this body of death or from the body of this death

I thank my God he says through Jesus Christ oh Lord the deliverance is there in principle God himself has obtained the victory in and through the death and resurrection of our Lord we are justified by this but we still have this and without this we will not overcome and without overcoming we will not sit with him in the floor that is the principle this remaining sin that very matter of the remnant of Egypt in the heart of Israel the remaining sin in the life of God's people God is saying to us today if you do not mortify that then it stands in the way of your progress to the Lord the enjoyment of all that Christ and that brings us to look at the prayer itself of Moses very briefly the prayer the importunate prayer now God had said to him let me alone that my wrath may wax hot against them and that I may consume them and I will make of thee a great nation he had said to them they are thy people they are you people Moses as if he was saying now dismissively of them they are no longer my people you can compare that in your own studies with how he spoke of

[25 : 22] Israel through the prophet Hosea Hosea called one of his children lo amin which meant not my people God demonstrating that he was passing them aside that he was saying concerning them for idolatrous ways and for their sin you are no longer my people I don't want to call you my people we have terrible things we have covenant people of God to be spoken to in that way by their God that they are called no amin not my people and Moses you see is told by God now therefore let me alone know what that says about true spiritual vital prayer you see Moses in prayer with all reverence he was ruling on God he was indeed blessing

God he was taking God in all his promises and all the truth that we'll see and he was putting all these things before God himself and God knew that this Moses was a man who gripped himself and all that he was as he revealed himself to him and Moses himself was told by God what a wonderful emphasis when he says now that for Moses leave me alone that I may destroy them that I may consume what a testimony to the kind of prayer that this man Moses was used to pray what a wonderful thing if God would say about ourselves that we were those who would not let him go that we were those who in prayer to him took the grip of God and pressed his promises to him well that is what he's saying about let me alone but Moses says

Moses besought the Lord as God and said Lord why does thy wrath wax halt against thy people which thou hast brought forth out of the land of Egypt now notice he's saying why why does thy wrath burn against them and we mustn't support that Moses was unaware of the reason why God was angry with the people he knew that he knew that it was for their sin he knew that it was for their idolatrous way for their impatience in waiting upon him for that which remained of Egypt in the heart why then is Moses putting it this way why does he ask such a question well it's really repeated isn't it throughout the scripture the same sort of thing because what this really amounts to is really saying with God Lord will thou not be merciful to them he is not at all suggesting that he doesn't know why God is angry with the people but he is remonstrating as it were with

God Lord why are they not thy people are they not brought out into this wilderness for thee to lead them are they not the people of thy promises are they not the people whom thou hath brought out with great power and with a mighty hand Lord are they not thy people why shouldst deal with them in this way that's the end he is not at all saying Lord these people don't deserve thy wrath to burn against him he is not saying Lord they don't deserve to be punished for their sin but he is saying really Lord are they not still thy covenant people Lord wilt thou not do what thou hast promised for them Lord are they not those whom thou hast brought out to be a people for thyself O Lord why does thy wrath watch fought against thy people ■ revival a prayer of Isaiah looking that God in chapter 64 would rend the heavens and that he would come down but what is one of his great arguments there in prayer he wrestled with God he says look down from heaven and behold doubtless thou art our father though Abraham be ignorant of us and Israel acknowledges not thou

O Lord art our father our redeemer thy name is from everlasting O Lord why has thou made us to err from thy ways return for thy servant's sake the tribes of thine inheritance the people of thy holiness have possessed it the sanctuary this place of Zion for such a little time our adversaries have trodden down my sanctuary and he says we are thy thou never bear rule over them these heathen Chaldeans they were not called by thy name why does thy wrath wax hard against thy people what Moses is really saying is Lord it is not a time for invitation not a time for new things not a time to return to return from thy ways but to return to them Lord remember this thy people and then he goes on to speak secondly of the Egyptians why for should the Egyptians speak and say for mischief did he bring them out to slay them in the mountains and so on now he's not so much concerned about what the Egyptians think of the Israelite people as what the Egyptians think about God because all the way through this prayer there is one dominant emphasis right through it an emphasis that you and I must never neglect that must always be at the very top of all our emphasis in prayer it is the emphasis upon the honour of God

[32 : 14] God's honour God's honour God's honour in his people God's honour against the Egyptians wherefore should the Egyptians speak and say for mischief did he bring them out to slay them in the mountains oh Lord what are the Egyptians going to say about thee how they are going to misrepresent thee how thy great honour is going to be brought into disrepute is God you see that he's thinking about it is not so much the Israelites themselves though they are involved but it is God it is God always God through and through how applicable that is to our own age again it's repeated throughout scripture therefore should they even say where is their God aren't we confronted with that situation today when those who are so disbelieving and so arrogant in their atheism are rightly saying to the church of God where is thy God where is the power where is the evidence that he is really a great God who saves when they see the church in our day so impotent when they see the church so lacking in influence and in power when they see the influence and in power when they see the church so departed from the ways of God so much defective from the truth of God and when they see the church so small in numbers when they see that all of these things have taken place and they say where is your God when they say to those of us who believe the Bible as the word of God where is your God aren't you the ones who are emphasizing these great issues of revival why are you so small why are you so impotent why are you so impotent why are you so powerless you see the temptation is well let's make us God let's make us things which we can see that will go before us what Moses say to us not a time for that it is a time for that it is a time for that it is a time for that it is a time for concentrating upon the honor of God it is a time for having such sentiments as you see in the world and its opposition and in the antagonism that it has to the truth of God when that should pain our hearts not only because it hurts us not only because it affects us because the honor of our God is involved and we are not passionately consumed with that honor of God as we should are we we are not passionately taken over with the implications of having the name of God upon us isn't this Isaiah's great argument they were never called by thy name O Lord we are called by the name of God we are passionately we are saying in a very professional way we are passionately in love with that name of God and how little we realize all the implications of that this was a lesson you see us feel had to learn again and again up make us God not what we do try not only through that to fulfill that our promise but the leaders will decide to be called upon us all just come together and not and what you see us know while listening to us are arte countyNABA we have to live with God and read the sermon our saints you see the man the days of Samuel a diet ■ upon us and being also about us today we have been watching this heaven and that you are kind of competencies we are inspired of being so different we are tired of waiting around theseoms■■■■■ kit us we are tired of being so different we are tired of waiting around these things are not working for us let's change them let's bring in these changes up and make us gods so sadly prevalent in our old days these things aren't working we hate we've got to

introduce changes we've got to change our type of worship our type of service we've got to change our emphasis we've got to cut down on this preaching we've got to introduce more appealing items to the world that's outside what is it around to? well it's not the same thing before you know where you are you are you're in adultery you're in deception from the truth they're introducing things which while they may appeal to the world ah but are they pleasing to God are they that which we know is acceptable to him whatever we say about waiting for him whatever we say about the times of delay when God himself has chosen to take his hand back and not to bestow his power of mightily that is no reason for defection from it and Moses is saying Lord why should the Egyptians say that is what we must carry to God that is what our prayers must have as we set out these things before him oh Lord for thine own honour for thy name sake hear what the heathen are saying about me come come come thy thou come for thine honour for thine honour for thy honour come and visit thy people turn from thy kirstrah visit not thy wrath upon them and wrath remember mercy what has that come to this same in the honour of God passionately and prayerfully set out before him one other point just in closing Moses thirdly goes back to earlier times remember Abraham Isaac and he is saying to him one other point just in closing Moses thirdly goes to the second Israel thy servant to whom thou swearest by thine own self and said to them I will multiply your seat as the stars of heaven and so on he is laying out before God in prayer the great fact of his covenant promenade and what he's really saying is Lord are thou not the same God that spoke to Abraham and are these people that I see here on Mount Sinai over whom thou hast said let me alone that I will consume them Lord are they not indeed the substance of what thou didst promise to Abraham to Isaac and Jacob and Israel thy servants to whom thou swear and said I will multiply thy seat is this not thy seat isn't that what he's saying what is he really saying he's saying this oh Lord but you are not he saying what is he saying what is he saying what is he saying will thy promise is not to be brought to past is thy world to Jacob and Israel to Abraham not secure k he says for my heart those are their families well

If we are to pray with this kind of prayer that we must have, this importunate prayer of Moses, and it is a knowledge of the will of God in Scripture.

Yes, we may have our lists for prayer, our items for prayer, we may have our knowledge of the conditions of the world in which we live, and we may write them down and we may remind ourselves that we have to pray about these things. We're not discounting that altogether, but we're saying this is much more important. That you and I must know your Bible. If you do not know your Bible and know your Bible thoroughly, you will not pray in this manner. And you and I will not be able to pray in the manner in which the Bible itself brings out this true wrestling prayer before us. Why do I say that? Because of this, that it was Moses' knowledge of the purposes of God, of the promises of God, of the saving works of God, of all that God has spoken of and revealed of himself, it was that that made his prayer so powerful.

And the more you and I know this Bible, where that will of God is revealed to us, where God's great and mighty works and principles of salvation are set out, where all of these things are available to us, the less we know it, the less we know it, the less we study it, the less we apply ourselves to it and it to us, the less we are going to pray. And we pray with this prayer.

[41 : 20] These are the great things that Moses presses before God, his covenant promises, his own name and the honour of his name.

These are the potent petitions, the very things upon which his prayer is presented. God himself and his glory, what he has said concerning his people, his unchangeable covenant promises, and Moses is saying, Lord will thou not do this.

And really, it does not allow to this for himself. God is indebted to one of my brethren for having raised this recently with me.

What is the most potent plea that we can enter in before God in prayer? We could think of many. We think of those that Moses himself spoke of, the covenant promises of God, the honour and name of God, the salvation that God has promised to his people, the end that God has in mind for his people, the coming of God's kingdom as we'll see this evening and so on, all of these things.

But where do they come to this point? Where has God demonstrated above all other ways and above all other things and above all other people, these great issues? They are in this, in the depth and the direction of our Lord, particularly in the shedding of his blood.

[43 : 07] We are persuaded of this. But the reason our prayers are so small and so poor is due to this one thing, that we are not as appreciative as we should be of the blood of Christ.

Because when you say the blood of Christ, you say everything about God's purposes, God's promises, God's salvation, God's people, God's honour of his own name, it comes back to this.

He that spares not as we should be of the blood of Christ. He that spares not his own son, how shall he not with him others freely give us all things?

What was Paul saying? Paul was saying, Lord when thou hast done this in thine own son, thou thou not do all as thou have promised.

The promises of God, the promises of God, are ye and amen in him. And when you go to God and pray, there is nothing more powerful, nothing more potent with God himself that you can feel in the flesh.

[44 : 28] That Christ has shed his blood. And you can say if you are quite legitimate in whatever way is proper for you to say, O Lord, has the blood of Christ been shed?

And shall thy people not have bits of thee over their enemies? Lord, has the blood of Christ been shed? And shall sin be dominant in thy own heart?

Lord, has the blood of Christ been shed? Will thou be angry with thy two? You see that is what it comes to. The significance in our appreciation of it.

The significance of the blood of Christ. Lord, O God, we teach thee that thou would indeed teach us to pray.

We acknowledge our need of thy spirit. That thou would lead us into this relation with thyself and communion with thee. By which we may be able to spread in thy holy presence.

[45 : 36] The things which we know thou would have to ask of thee. And we pray that thou would make us more familiar with the terms of thy salvation.

With thy will revealed in scripture. And enable us, Lord, in our thankfulness to thee. And in our... ..

... ..