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**November 13, 2011**



## **THE HOPE OF PRAYER**

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“Pray for the Entire World” is our praxis, or practice, for today. We are looking at two passages this morning that are so, so important to us. The first is in the book of Exodus in the thirty-third chapter beginning with the twelfth verse.

A sort of a synopsis of the Old Testament is the desire for a father like Abraham, a Savior like Moses, and a king like David. Moses is our character this morning, and Moses is going to be leading us in this conversation about how it is that we are called to pray for the world and how it is that we are called to live.

Moses is an interesting guy, an intriguing guy. He is Hebrew but he wasn't raised as a Hebrew. He was raised in Pharaoh's court. So some of the cultural things, some of the things that his Hebrew family would understand were probably a little bit alien to him.

After forty years, right at his fortieth birthday, Moses ends up committing murder because he becomes angry at the treatment of a Hebrew by an Egyptian. He then he goes away. He lives, marries, has flocks. Everything seems to be good until God calls him and tells him to go back where he would be threatened with losing his own life to free his people with whom he didn't even grow up. Then we have the story of him going back and God setting the people free through the words and the actions of Moses.

Now we see, in the thirty-third chapter in the book of Exodus, that the people are gathered in that wilderness, that desert area, and it is about time for them to be sent on. God has given the law, he has given the Ten Commandments, and he has called Moses up on the mountain to have a long, long conversation with a long set of rules and laws that are to be presented before the people. Then there is a long conversation about the tabernacle, and you have to really get into it to try to grab why that is going on. It is a long conversation about what God wants to be built and how God wants the Ten Commandments and the bones of the ancestors to be carried in this ark, or in this tabernacle.

All of this is to let us know that what God is ultimately doing in Exodus. He is presenting an opportunity for his glory to be known, for his presence to be understood. It is a pretty magnificent thing, told with great detail, with long sets of laws, understandings, and things that form the people. It's a pretty big thing. It's actually a huge thing, and it really lends itself to the transcendence of God. For example, as we read a little bit further than we said this morning, you are going to notice that the face of God can't be seen or you will die, so transcendent is God. Listen for the word of our Lord:

### *Exodus 33:12-17*

*Moses said to the Lord, 'See, you have said to me, "Bring up this people"; but you have not let me know whom you will send with me. Yet you have*

*said, "I know you by name, and you have also found favour in my sight." Now if I have found favour in your sight, show me your ways, so that I may know you and find favour in your sight. Consider too that this nation is your people.' He said, 'My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest.' And he said to him, 'If your presence will not go, do not carry us up from here. For how shall it be known that I have found favour in your sight, I and your people, unless you go with us? In this way, we shall be distinct, I and your people, from every people on the face of the earth.'*

*The Lord said to Moses, 'I will do the very thing that you have asked; for you have found favour in my sight, and I know you by name.' Moses said, 'Show me your glory, I pray.' And he said, 'I will make all my goodness pass before you, and will proclaim before you the name, "The Lord"; and I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy. But', he said, 'you cannot see my face; for no one shall see me and live.' And the Lord continued, 'See, there is a place by me where you shall stand on the rock; and while my glory passes by I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and I will cover you with my hand until I have passed by; then I will take away my hand, and you shall see my back; but my face shall not be seen.'*

Moses is in this conversation. His people, his stiff-necked people (Moses and God agree on that), are down working with Moses's brother Aaron to melt up all their gold so that they can make a golden calf and create an idol for worship.

I was with a wonderful friend of mine in Africa. It's one of the great opportunities that, when I am there, I get to hang out with people who are important to me. One of them is an older priest, Father Tom from Ireland, who is 77 years old. Father Tom has been in Africa for, I think, close to 40 years and still active in preaching. He is one of the best preachers I have ever heard. He preaches in the ward for mass

on Sunday morning, and I have started going to mass because he is just amazing to me.

Father Tom shared an encounter he had earlier that week with a woman who had lost her husband. She is pregnant and is going to have a baby soon. Her husband had died tragically. As he sat with her, he asked her how she was, what she was going to do, and how she was going to handle the loss of her husband. And she said, "Well, I have decided that, when my child is born, I am going to see my husband's face in my baby's face and that will bring me comfort."

I think that there is something incredibly deep about that. Not just the way a woman might grieve, but truly what happens right here. You see what we have in the Old Testament is God's presence, I mean, very clearly it's God's presence. It's the grandeur, the transcendence of God. It's this incredible God that is so holy that his name can't be spoken. A God that is so holy that, if his face is seen, you die. This God sets up all these things for our people. He gives them these understandings of how to build the tabernacle and then, later, how the temples should be built and all these ways to be able to focus on the transcendence of God. He does these incredible miracles and everybody witnesses them. They are not just these isolated things, they are these ten things that happen in order to get us out of Egypt. And then there is this ongoing presence that we see of God, and it's this grandeur that we see of him.

And yet, that grandeur and that transcendence just doesn't seem to be enough for us. We wander away even while Moses is just up on the mountain, we start to melt our gold down because we think he is away too long, and we don't trust. It just amazes me because, you know, we've seen these things, we have had these experiences, we've witnessed these miracles, but it just doesn't seem to work. What we end up finding is that when that doesn't work, we find the very presence of God in the face of a child, his Son. We find the very

presence of God. We find the very power of God in the face of a baby who grows up to be a man who's cut down in the prime of his life. It's an amazing story.

Our New Testament lesson comes in the Gospel of John today. It's the seventeenth chapter beginning with the twentieth verse. Now this is the longest talk and prayer that we find of Jesus in the Gospel of John.

This is the night of his betrayal, the night before his execution, and Jesus, according to the Gospel of John, is in a place they call the Upper Room on the other side of the Kidron Valley. He begins to teach his disciples. He is preparing them. It's a farewell discourse. It's pretty common to do it that way, from a literary standpoint, from a cultural standpoint, and then at the end of this discourse he begins to pray. Now we usually think of him being in Gethsemane in the Gospel of John. However, that's not where he appears to be because he hasn't crossed the Kidron yet but he is praying.

It's important for us to realize that in this prayer, more than likely as it would be typical, that Jesus is personally praying, but his disciples are gathered around and hearing what he is saying. There is a kind of a teaching that is going on, a communication not only with his Heavenly Father, but also with the people who are around. So Jesus prays really for three things. He prays for himself. It's an amazing thing, a painful thing, a horrible thing that is going to come to him in just a matter of hours. He prays for the disciples who are with him. Then, in this passage, you will see that he prays for those who are yet to come, those whom his disciples will bring. Listen again for the word of our Lord:

*John 17:20-23*

*'I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.'*

Do you notice that, in the Old Testament, the passage says, "Show me your glory," and God says, "Okay, but you can't see my face, you have to be tucked away." Here Jesus, in his prayer to his father, says, "The glory that you have given me I have given them." It seems to me that that glory is what makes our faces shine when we trust and believe in him. Let's talk about that.

You are going to hear a lot about Africa in the coming weeks. When we, a group of twelve of us, are there, you are going to hear a lot from us in the course of the weeks. You can't be there and not. I wanted to start with something that I am finding is a little bit of a pattern for me. It's a thing that I get asked when I am with people for a longer period of time and they kind of get to know me or the real Jim kind of comes out. I often get asked, "Jim, tell me what you were like in high school?" Now this is not because people are really interested in how I was in high school, but it is kind of a way they think to understand why I am acting like I am acting now, as if there is a direct parallel. Over the years, I have found that this is the way it plays out.

A guy never asks you, "Hey, what were you like in high school?" Guys don't care. In fact guys know that there are only four types of guys on the face of the earth. They can guess and there is about twenty-five per cent probability they get it right just by guessing.

Always when I get asked this, I'm asked that by a woman. What I find is that it's a way to try to think to understand why I am acting like I am at that particular time.

Let's go back to assuming that it's all explained in high school. It happened in Africa a couple of times by people on our team, but it happened especially to me in a prior church I served. I was a young pastor, when a young elder, a woman, came in to meet with me one day. She said, "I'm trying to figure you out, Jim, and I need to ask you some questions about high school." And I'm like "Okay, what is it?" And she says, "When you were in high school, you sat in the back of the room and threw spitballs at girls like me. Right?" I'm not going to admit to that, I'm going to leave that one alone.

But here is the other thing that she said that was kind of interesting. She said, "You were the guy in the class that, when everybody went around and the teacher called on your name to know whether you were there, everybody said, 'Here.' 'Here.' 'Here.' But, when it got to you, you said, 'PRESENT!'" I decided that I was going to use it as an opportunity to maybe go a little bit deeper with her, and I said, "I probably did do that because, you know, do you really just want to be here or do you really want to be present in life?"

Now when a woman is trying to work out stuff that went on in high school and is projecting it on you, it is probably not a really good idea to handle it the way it did. So that's the first bit of advice for all of our guys here. But I really want to think about that for a minute. I want to come back to it. We really spend a lot of our life just being here if we are honest. Kind of going through the motions. I'm here, and I'm just not paying any attention here, and I'm just simply here. How often in your life are you truly present? I mean awake, aware, attuned to what's going on? Where are those places in your life where you are truly present?

Moses knows that he has to be truly present if he is going to pull off this leadership thing. Moses has got it. It's a rough thing. He doesn't understand the culture. He was born a Hebrew but he wasn't raised a Hebrew. He is not a young man anymore. He has got to go back. He's got a stiff-necked people to deal with; they just don't seem to get it. He and God both agree on that. He knows that if he is going to be able to pull off this leadership thing and make this thing work that he has got to be fully present. He has got to be in it. He can't just be here. He has to be present, he has to know what is going on; he has got to be on his game in order to pull this off.

It is so wonderful that he has this conversation with God. He keeps saying, "Help me out with this. I know you have told me this, but you didn't tell me who was going with me. 'Yet you have said, "I know you by name, and you have also found favour in my sight." Now if I have found favour in your sight, show me your ways, so that I may know you and find favour in your sight. Consider too that this nation is your people.'" Moses is really working it with God. "I have to have some help here in order to pull this off." Sure enough, God gives him this incredible assistance. What I find that is so amazing about it is that what God says in that conversation with him is this: "My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest."

"My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest." You see, in the Bible, to be truly present, not just simply to be here, but to be truly present is to be in the presence of God, in the rest that comes with that. That's why, in the eleventh chapter of the Gospel of Mathew, Jesus says, "Come to me all you who are weary and carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls."

To be truly present is to be in the presence of God. But for us as believers of Christ, it's more than just being in the presence of this

transcendent God, this powerful God from whom we have to hide our face. It's to be in the real presence of Jesus. You see, that is what makes our faith what it is. That's what makes our understanding of life what it is. It is our faith to believe that now we are in the presence of God when we are in the presence of Jesus. And, when we are in the presence of Jesus, something radical happens in the New Testament.

You see, in the Old Testament it's all about the grandeur, the glory--really at the beginning. It starts to change some with King David, but it's all about this big presence of God. Here is the way to go to the tabernacle, here are the rules to follow, you can't see me, you can't speak my name, so holy, so big am I. But when you get to the New Testament, you come to realize that that didn't work, and so now it's what is often called the "grand inversion." It is the idea that the presence of God now is just flipped until you get to Philippians chapter two which explains it so beautifully. Talking about Jesus, it says that even though he was God, he didn't regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but he took on the form of slave. He humbled himself.

We start to realize that now to be in the presence of God is to be in the presence of humility. Everything changes. Everything changes in life. It's not about the huge times, the huge experiences, it's not about the big sunrises and the sunsets, it's about the relationship that you have one on one with this humble God, this God who is born in obscurity, this God who is raised in obscurity in a podunk town and fulfills a promise and a prophecy. Yes, but it's one that is hard to understand even in the Old Testament. What we are as the people of God is to be a people who find the presence of God in the humility of the world.

In chapter seventeen in the Gospel of John when Jesus is praying, he gives us this: "As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they

also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given them.”

This is what the world doesn't understand, but it's what the world so desperately craves. The world doesn't want new power systems. The world is tired of those. The world doesn't want to have total control. The world realizes that that's not working. The world, instead, is trying to find ways to deal with the questions of suffering and abandonment and loneliness and pain. What we have to offer is to say that the glory that He has given us shines in us. The glory that is shown in just a matter of hours when he is betrayed and tried in a mockery trial and executed. We come to realize that this is who we are. That this is the witness we have. It's in his presence that we see his glory and experience rest.

It's in the presence of what the world would see as weakness. It's in the presence of the pain or the suffering of the world that we find an encounter with God most fully. This is the thing that just strikes me and overwhelms me over and over and over, He is a mighty God, a powerful God, a creator God, but if you want to come to know him, if you want to come to know that rest, you come to know it in the simple small places of weakness when you can't figure it out. When no matter what you have tried, no matter what treatment, no matter what counseling, no matter what thought, no matter what, you come to recognize that there is something of the presence of God in the midst of that weakness that speaks to something that is bigger than you.

I saw that when we were in Kenya in so many ways. One of those is the Joy Home. You, we opened an orphanage. It's about two months old, and right now we have three moms who are raising seven children each. We have twenty-one kids in the Nazareth Joy Home. It's an amazing thing. These are all children who are totally orphaned. Many of them are totally abandoned and come from

situations that they didn't earn or deserve. Most of them are HIV positive.

I had the privilege of being able to see them both in the evening and in the morning when it was time for medicine. The HIV positive kids would gather around a big table with all their medicine with their names on it for them to take. Those who are brothers and sisters now that were not HIV positive would encourage them as they took the medication. A number of these kids are kids who actually have AIDS now because they were in a situation where they were not able to be compliant with their medications before. There is something of the glory of God that I saw in those children.

There is something of the glory of God that I saw in a little boy named David. David is three, four years old. I'm not quite sure; nobody seems to know for sure. David and his older brother had a mom who struggled with overwhelming emotional disability. David and his brother Michael had been tied to a bed for four days when a neighbor found them, dehydrated and afraid.

When I first met David, close to a month ago now, every time an adult walked into a room that wasn't his mom, David would run and scream and go to the farthest corner. But when I left, the last day I was there, David came running out to give me a huge hug, to wave and to say goodbye. He didn't even know what it means in English, but he was taught to say good-bye. There is something of the glory of God in David that shines brighter than any power or principality of this world.

Anastasia is a little girl whose mom died within just a few weeks of her being born. Her mom died from AIDS and Anastasia's grandmother took the four kids; the oldest was six. Anastasia was the baby, and the grandmom worked in the rock quarry where she would chip rocks to make smaller rocks to make gravel. So she

would strap Anastasia on her back every morning, take her to the rock quarry, and Anastasia would stay on her back when her grandma worked all day long. At the end of the day, her grandmom would have made about \$1-\$1.50 and she'd buy some groceries the best she could. She'd go home and try to prepare a meal for the rest of the kids, for all of them. She'd keep Anastasia on her back and, late at night, she would take Anastasia, who was asleep on her back, and put her in a box. The bottom line is that Anastasia's legs never developed. I saw Anastasia take her first steps. I saw her brothers and sisters smile and shout. I saw her grandmother and aunties scream with joy. I cried. I saw something of the glory of God that smiles over them.

We prayed for Moses a little while ago. Moses is eight years old; he's all boy, that's 100 percent for sure. Moses was a street kid. Found him on the street. Let me tell you this, if you are a street kid, eight years old that has made it in the majority world, you could sell ice to the Eskimos. Moses came in; he had a whole vocabulary that didn't quite fit with family values. Moses came in, and he knew that the only way that he was going to be able to have a meal was to hoard it for himself. He knew that the only way he was going to have anything was to be able to take it and hide it away. He would bury stuff out in the yard. But after just a couple of months, Moses is one of the biggest sharers in the entire place.

I'm not in any way fooling myself into thinking that these children aren't going to struggle and wrestle with issues. We have counselors there for them. We have counselors there for the moms. I understand all of that; I'm not an idiot. But I do know this: I know that there is something about the glory of God in those children that overwhelms me. I know that there is something about the glory of God that comes in these encounters that we have in these places of greatest weakness and humility because this is where our God is made known.

I know it doesn't make sense to the world. Sometimes it doesn't make sense to me, but I can't help that when I experience it and know that this is good. That this is what his plan is this, this is what his will is, this is what he desires for us and he gives us the privilege of being that light, of being that glory in this world. He gives it to us, as the people of God.

So we need to bring this presence of God, this glory of God to our prayers. Not only for these children that we pray for every week, but to the cause that we fight for when we are in the midst of poverty and HIV.

There have been some amazing things that have happened in the world of HIV/AIDS in the last couple of years. In particular, within this last year there have been some really positive things happening. We have come to realize some amazing ways to reduce HIV infection rates. But here is the thing that is also happening. I have been going to Nazareth Hospital for years, you know that, but this is the first time in the last three or four years that I have seen what I have seen. In the pediatric ward, more than 50 percent of the kids are AIDS victims. Last year, even this summer, it was about 10-15 percent.

What's happening? One of the things that is happening has been the economy in the world and the cut backs in funding that we, as a nation, have been able to give. I don't want to get political about it, I just want to simply say this: that I understand that we can't sustain something forever. I know that the millions of people for whom we provide treatment in Africa is something that is a great commitment for the American people. But when our economy began to tank, and only .7 percent of our federal budget goes to humanitarian causes, that meant a radical change. People are less likely to seek treatment now than they were. I understand that nations need to stand on their own. I understand all of that, but the timing is lousy. So we need to

pray for the glory of God to shine on those who make such weighty decisions.

We need to bring the presence of the glory of God to the persecuted church. Hundreds of millions in this world worship today in fear in more than fifty nations. We need to bring the presence of the glory of God to such a world, but we need to do it in the way of humility. You see this is where our power is. It doesn't make sense to the world, sometimes it doesn't even make sense to me, but it's where I experience the power of God. It's in our humility. It's in our weakness. It's in our identifying with those who are in need. It's in our being able to share in this world and its brokenness.

I had an opportunity to be with another dear friend of mine. Outside of my family, he's one of the two or three most important people in my life. If you know me, you've heard about Simon Mwangi a number of times. I met Simon in the Mathari Mental Hospital, a medieval place if there ever was one. Simon is a man who has struggled with mental illness since he was in the sixth grade. He never could make it past the eighth grade in school, but in the eighth grade he was number one in his class.

He has had a rollercoaster life, a life where he has been stigmatized. I watch it every time I see him: people cross on the other side of the road or the other side of the path because they are afraid that there is something contagious that he has in mental illness. He is disregarded. No one will employ him. Simon is one of the most courageous people that I have ever met in my life. Simon has a mental illness, but mental illness does not have him. God does.

Simon came to see me off the last night I was in Kenya. Kate and Rudy were still there, Don and Cheryl Johnston from Chicago were there on our team, and we invited him in. He had a letter that he had written for Sheryl, my wife, and he wanted me to give that to Sheryl,

and then he sat down with us. There is openness about Simon, a genuineness and humility about him. He talks about his illness, he talks about every three years in the course of his life. It's been at least once every three years that he has been hospitalized for long periods of time and horrible situations. He is in his fourth year now and he just prays that it will continue. We have a small job for him that gives him enough to be able to get paid and to be able to live.

When Simon sits down and he talks, he talks of things of God. "Pastor, I'm reading my Bible. What do you think about this? Pastor if I had a picture Bible, it might help me with this understanding." I said, "Simon, when you think about the Bible, who do you identify with the most?" and Simon says, "Oh pastor, that's easy. In the Bible I identify most with King David." It seemed a little unusual to me. Here's a guy that people are afraid to even be around. I said, "Simon, why King David?" He said, "Well, pastor, because he knows my life. He knows what it's like when the darkness comes and I don't know myself, I don't know who I am, I don't know what I'm doing. When I'm in the deepest, darkest valley, he reminds me that God is with me and I'm never alone."

Simon is not only my hero, but, when I'm with him, I feel the glory of God. It humbles me because, you know, my life has been pretty easy. I mean I have my stuff, I have a lot of sins, but I was born with a mind. I can think, I can reason. (Don't ask Sheryl about that, but generally people agree that I can reason.) I can wake up in the morning and when I walk down the street people don't cross on the other side to avoid me. I mean, I was born in the United States white and a man. Let's be honest, my life has been pretty easy.

Simon's has been just the opposite. Yet there has never been a place that I have felt any more the presence of God than when I am with him. The face of God is in his glory. Here is simply what I want to say about this: just as Simon cannot be defined by his illness so, the

world can't be defined by its brokenness, its loneliness, its pain. If we want to be the glory of God, we have to go to those places where it is, perhaps, the deepest darkest valley. We have to go to those places where people are born of the wrong (by the culture's standards) color, or gender. Or those places where we just feel as if we are beaten up and we can't get it sorted out and we can't figure it out. We have to go to those places because that is where the glory of God shines most fully. It's where the glory of God is going to be made known in this world, and it's where you and I become part of it. That's what our prayers are about, that's what we lift up, that's how we pray, and that's how we live.

As I was sitting with Simon, I said to him at the very end when it was getting dark and he needed to go since he had a long walk to his village. But before he left, I said, "Simon, will you pray for me?" Without any hesitation Simon started to pray and he must have prayed for twenty or thirty minutes. He started in English, went to Kiswahili, went to his mother tongue Kikuyu, and ultimately he was praying, I'm convinced, in some holy, heavenly language. Though I only understood one of the four languages, I understood what it was to be in the presence of a man who knew what it was to pray and knew what it was to have a king as a God.

While he was praying, I had this vision that there is going to be a day when Simon is going to be made well in every aspect. And he and I will sit at a table that has been prepared for us and he will no longer have to keep thanking me for me helping him with petty little things. Instead, we will rejoice that the glory of God is eternal.

I hope that means something for you today. It does for me. I want to go full circle and simply say this: Do you want to simply be here in life? Simply show up? Or do you want to truly be present, to truly be present? The choice is yours. "But as for me and my house..."

Let's pray.

Father I thank you for today. I thank you for your love and grace. I thank you that you are our King. But I thank you, Lord, that you also let us know that you are in those places that are the deepest, darkest valleys when the darkness comes. I want to pray for me and my people, and I want to pray for your world, Lord. I want to pray, Lord Jesus, that your glory would be made known in our faces and in the faces of those whom we meet. I want to pray, Lord, that we would embrace this great inversion of our faith to know that you didn't revert equality with God as something to be exploited, but you emptied yourself, you took on the form of a slave. And, Lord, whenever I am treated like a slave, I pray that you would help me understand that it might be the opportunity for me and my life, based on all the privilege that I have been given, to be disregarded long enough to be able to seek you. I pray that you would bind me to the Davids and the Anastasias and the Moseses and the Simons of this world so that I might feel and see and be your glory. I pray that this is the prayer of my family, those of us who are gathered here today. To the gift of your holy spirit, we pray. Amen.