

So, tonight, prayer in the Book of Revelation - a book of fantastic visions, full of dramatic imagery and symbolism and one which speaks of death and destruction as well as hope, joy and fulfillment. This is a book that echoes the prayers of God's people through the ages and details the results of that prayer.

Revelation speaks of the completion of God's purposes for this world and the place that prayer holds in that purpose. It is the final book of the Bible, and here in the closing verses of the whole of scripture we find the most complete prayer possible: 'Come, Lord Jesus'. This prayer echoes the prayers we find offered in John's visions of the heavenly throne room and the answer to that prayer is revealed as these visions progress.

Starting in Chapter 4, we find ourselves in the throne room of God, a place of worship where the 24 elders, the 4 living creatures and the angel hosts declare that only God is holy and almighty, only the Lamb is worthy and so will receive glory and honour, power and wealth, wisdom and strength. We see the throne on which God himself sits, encircled by an emerald rainbow, we see bright dazzling flashes of lightning and hear peals of thunder rumbling around the heavens. These are physical signs pointing to the very presence of our holy God, similar to the signs of cloud and fire and earthquake seen at God's presence with the Israelites in the Old Testament. And in the throne room of God we also find songs of worship proclaiming who God is.

This grand vision is then built on as John sees what happens in the throne room. There is no time to go into the details of all that happens here - indeed it would take many hours to explore it all. So tonight we are simply going to pick up three details of this heavenly action.

First, in Chapter 5, we see the preparations of the elders and the creatures for the prayers of God's people to be offered to God. Here we find ourselves standing in the inner sanctuary of this heavenly temple and close to the Holy of Holies where God himself sits. The elders and the creatures appear holding golden bowls full of incense which are the prayers of the saints themselves. This incense has not yet been burnt; this is merely a preparation for what is to come. First, we see the evils of human history, conquest and slaughter, oppression and poverty, famine, disease and death, including the martyrdom of God's own people, all of which make a mockery of the rule of the sovereign God. This mockery is answered by the souls of the martyrs in 6.10, as they call for the judgement of God on unrighteousness and ask 'how long?' But final judgement is delayed. They are told to wait as God gives time for more people to choose to know him and be his.

After that gathering there is silence in heaven. So far heaven seems to have been very noisy and suddenly we have silence and the only action is an angelic thurifer offering the prayers of God's people to God. This silence during the incense offering mirrors the practice of the Jerusalem temple and was supposedly so that God could hear the prayers offered to him. Suddenly, the silence and stillness is shattered by the angel hurling the fire of God onto the earth. We again see bolts of lightning, hear peals of thunder and there is an earthquake; God has appeared. The prayers offered are answered; God's holiness has come to earth, judgement is made, his kingdom of righteousness has arrived in full and all unrighteousness is swept away and destroyed.

This is all very dramatic and powerful imagery, but what does it say to us here on earth now. We aren't in the throne room of God, we are part of an often unjust, destructive

and violent society and world, a place that seems so often to be out of control, thoroughly ungodly and bent on disaster.

John's prayer in chapter 22 is the same as that of the martyrs and saints: 'Come, Lord Jesus'. This vision in Revelation shows a powerful and dramatic answering judgement to prayer that led to the coming of God's rule and kingdom here on earth in all its fullness, the beauty, glory and peace of which is described in chapter 21.

In chapter 22 then, John gives us the direct words of Christ, telling us that he is coming soon. Jesus then asks us to pray for his coming as Spirit-led people, his bride the Church and as hearers of his Word. Given the spiritual orientation of those of us who listen to him and are led by the Holy Spirit, there is also an invitation to drink deeply of the water of life that only he gives. This is then followed by John's prayer with which we are to join in 'Amen. Come, Lord Jesus'.

We can be sure that our prayers are as effective as the ones prayed in both John's vision and by John himself. Our prayers are powerful and effective, opening doors to God into this world and the lives of people we pray for. This is an encouragement to keep praying for Jesus to come, to bring his righteousness and to reveal himself in all holiness to the world. This prayer in revelation is also part of the prayer Jesus taught his disciples, words which we all know well: 'Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as in heaven'. Be assured that your prayers are powerful and effective tools in bringing God's kingdom to this earth, even if there is still delay in seeing its fullness. Keep praying, do not be discouraged, but persevere.

So, using words from both Revelation and Psalm 141, let us pray...

We call upon you, O Lord; come to us;  
Give ear to our voice when we call on you.  
Let our prayer be counted as incense before you.  
Come, Lord Jesus.