

Sermon preached by Pastor Ben Kuerth at Victory of the Lamb on June 18th, 2017 on Exodus 32:11-14.

Series: Prayer Is Powerful
Today's Focus: Stepping Into the Breach (Father's Day)

"Prayer moves our Father's heart"

Today we're going to see that prayer moves our Father's heart. So as we begin this new series about the power of prayer, let's start by talking with our God in prayer, ok?

"Merciful Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, plant the preached word deep into our hearts today so that we may receive and believe it, and be gladdened and comforted by it forever. Glorify your word in our hearts and lives. Make it so bright and warm that we may find our highest pleasure in it, and through your inspiration think and do what is right. By your Spirit's power cause your word to grow and bear fruit in us, prompt us to pray according to what you know is best as our dear heavenly Father, and we ask this all for the sake of Jesus Christ, your Son, who shows us just how valuable and important we are to you that he would put his life on the line and die for us. Amen."

Dear Friends, he stepped up. He stepped in. He was all alone. Except he knew that all around there were at the same time something like a couple million eyeballs all fixed on him. In front of him came an opposing player charging hard. Behind him was just the net. He was in the goalie's box – that in between space. And then came the ball – like a missile launched off the opposing player's foot. But he had anticipated. He lunged, arms outstretched. And he deflected the kick. Just in time! The ball sailed just outside the goal. His team won the World Cup soccer tournament! As the goalie, he had saved the game! "Hooray!" shouted a stadium full of fans and songs were sung long into the night.

It can be a lonely place, standing in the goalie's box, that space between the offensive player in front of you coming at you aiming to kick the ball and the net behind that you want to protect. But when it really counts there is no more important place to be. There is no more important position on a soccer team at that moment than the goalie who steps up into that in-between space to save the day.

This past week was our church's 10th annual soccer Bible camp. It wasn't the World Cup. But, 220 kids got to make new friends and learn about both soccer and their Savior, Jesus. So that was a big win all around! And of course there is one position that just about every kid wants to play at some point when we're scrimmaging. I'll bet you can guess what it is. That's right...the goalie! Except when they're all raising their hands to be the goalie...I've observed that it's not always because they're imagining making a big save in a world cup final.

Especially when it's hot outside, kids a lot of times volunteer to play goalie because they just don't want to have to run very far! Or because they want to leisurely lean on the goal. Or with 4 and 5 year-olds sometimes because they'd prefer to sit down in the grass in front of the goal and pick at clover instead of actually playing soccer. And so sometimes the job of us coaches is to say, "Hey, get up, the ball is coming. Look out!" And we do this out of love if only because we don't want to see their cute little faces caved in by someone's kick at point blank range! So you understand there can be different motivations for being a goalie. And some are more motivated than others.

Well today in the Bible we're going to hear a story from long ago about a servant of God named Moses. And what Moses did is kind of like what a motivated goalie does who steps up into the gap where he or she is all alone between the offensive player with the ball in front of them and the net behind them with the game on the line. In a sense what we're going to see is that Moses stepped in and saved the Israelites from disaster. He stood in the breach and with a fatherly like prayer he diverted the just and holy wrath of God that was coming fast and furious against the Israelites. It was coming because of their flagrant sins against God. Psalm 106 which we read earlier in the service gave some history and says, **"Moses stood in the breach before God, to keep his wrath from them"** (Psalm 106:23b).

Well what's a breach? ... It's a gap. It's a hole. It's a rift. It's a rupture. In our world we're getting more familiar with security *breaches* like when government databases get hacked, or data *breaches* like when your credit card gets skimmed at the pump. And that's because the act of breaching is an act of breaking, violating, or failing to observe a law. If you've ever had your identity hacked or your personal information breached, you feel violated, don't you? So when the Scriptures say that Moses stood in the breach before God, you know what this breach is, right?

It's a figure of speech describing the gap, the ruptured space, between the holy Creator God who made us and designed us to flourish in relationship with him...and a whole world full of human creatures like us who've violated God. Who've violated God by deliberately forgetting all that he has done for us, by ignoring the conscience he hard wired into us, by rejecting him as our Creator, chasing after the next new monetary high of instant gratification, manipulating situations and other people to suit our own plans, craving more and more new toys and distractions from the duties of our vocations, propping up our sense of identity by tearing down other people with gossip or lies, and by placing our fragile hopes in false gods like political parties or pride parades or technology or sports or success or the size of our bank accounts. The breach is that vast distance between holiness and sin, truth and untruth. It's the gap between God and us. There's been a breach. A cosmic rupture in our relationship with our Creator God.

You see as we get into the prayer that Moses prayed in just a minute we want to take note of the setting. Moses is up on Sinai, a mountain shrouded in smoke, where he has gone to meet with God. Moses has been gone just over a month and he's getting ready to go back down the mountain to deliver the Ten Commandments hot off the press so to speak, freshly engraved by the finger of God on stone tablets (we're not talking iPads here). This was the covenant, the contract, that God had made with Israel. He had chosen them out of pure grace to be his treasured possession out of all nations on the earth. He had rescued them from Egypt, performing miracles and wonders on their behalf even when they didn't deserve it. And the people had already agreed to the terms of this special covenant. The LORD, the Marvelous Maker of heaven and earth, the one true God, would be their God. The people of Israel would worship him alone. They would follow all his commands – the very first one of which says, **"You shall have no other gods"** (Exodus 20:3). And as Jesus made clear in his Sermon on the Mount these are the same Ten Commandments that apply not just to Israel but to all people of all time including you and me and modern Americans.

However, while Moses was on the mountain, there was trouble brewing in the Israelite camp below. You get a real sense of how restless and impatient human beings like us can be that they so quickly turned away from God. I mean they had just experienced the miraculous crossing of the Red Sea. They

had witnessed God's mighty deliverance with their own eyes. Yet within a month or so of Moses being gone, the people have already turned their backs on God. In the verse that starts off our chapter today it says, **When the people saw that Moses was so long in coming down from the mountain, they gathered around Aaron and said, "Come, make us gods who will go before us. As for this fellow Moses who brought us up out of Egypt, we don't know what has happened to him"** (Exodus 32:1).

And of course what they then talked Moses' brother Aaron into doing is fashioning a golden calf for them which they immediately began to worship in all of the sinfully shameful ways that the Egyptians did. Aaron proved to be a pushover. And this was Aaron's pathetic excuse that he later tried to give to Moses: **"You know how prone these people are to evil. ²³ They said to me, 'Make us gods who will go before us. As for this fellow Moses who brought us up out of Egypt, we don't know what has happened to him.' ²⁴ So I told them, 'Whoever has any gold jewelry, take it off.' Then they gave me the gold, and I threw it into the fire, and out came this calf!"** (Exodus 32:22-24).

I know it's Father's Day today. But sadly, Aaron sounds like a lot of modern day American dads, doesn't he? Someone who lets his kids do or have whatever they want. Someone who doesn't discipline them when they're rebellious. Someone who lets them decide if they want to go to church or not. Someone who even helps them set up other false gods in their life hoping they can sort of co-exist with God until eventually those false gods become more important than God—as tends to happen sometimes with sports tournaments and scholarship possibilities and standard of living benchmarks. Fathers, do you understand what an important spiritual role God has given you to play in your families? To love and cherish your wife as Christ loved the church. To make God (not your career, not your own personal comfort) the #1 object of your worship. To not be spiritually lazy but lead by example. To lovingly discipline. To teach your children the Bible. And like Moses, to step into the breach and pray for them.

You see God was justified in his anger. The Israelites had broken his covenant that they had already agreed to keep. They had violated its terms. So God told Moses in the verses that come right before our text: **⁹ "I have seen these people," the LORD said to Moses, "and they are a stiff-necked people. ¹⁰ 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."**

And what did Moses do? Well, I suppose he could've said, "That sounds fine with me. If you start over with me, I can't say I blame you. After all, no one's been quite as faithful to you as I have." But he didn't do that. Instead what did he do? He stepped into the breach. He interceded for God's mercy on behalf of the Israelites like a spiritual father praying to our heavenly Father.

¹¹ But Moses sought the favor of the LORD his God. "LORD," he said, "why should your anger burn against your people, whom you brought out of Egypt with great power and a mighty hand? ¹² 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 fierce anger; relent and do not bring disaster on your people. ¹³ Remember your servants Abraham, Isaac and Israel, to whom you swore by your own self: 'I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and I will give your descendants all this land I promised them, and it will be their inheritance forever.'" ¹⁴ Then the LORD relented and did not bring on his people the disaster he had threatened.

This is pretty incredible, isn't it? We're going to see this same kind of thing the next couple weeks in this series. Prayer is powerful! Moses stepped into the breach on behalf of the Israelites. He appealed to the LORD who had promised Abraham generations before that one of his descendants would be the Savior of the world. He said, "LORD, these are *your* people." And so he interceded for the Israelites like a true spiritual father. He asked God for mercy – like another righteous man of long ago named Job who regularly prayed for his children in case they had sinned and weren't even aware of it. And what did God do in response to Moses' prayer? God relented. He changed his course of action. He showed mercy instead of judgment. God himself didn't change, but he has promised to take our prayers into account so that things can happen differently when we pray. Our prayers are not just idle words that sort of go up to heaven and get lost in space. Rather, our prayers are heard by God himself. Prayer moves our Father's heart!

This is powerful truth, isn't it? What can we learn here from Moses' prayer? Well, maybe it sounds a little foreign to you and me, but did you take note of how Moses held God's words and promises back up to him? "Remember your servants Abraham, Isaac and Israel to whom you swore by your own self." Remember what you promised, LORD. You promised. Remember your promises!" This is a powerful incentive I think to keep learning more of the Bible and to even memorize precious parts of it...to be able to say when you pray, "God, you promised!" ... because you know what God has promised.

For when you pray, God especially wants you to do so knowing that he is now also your Father in heaven who has shown you mercy in Christ. And to do so confidently knowing that as Scripture says, "**The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective**" (James 5:16). Because how do you or I or anybody else know that not just someone like Moses' prayers are powerful and effective, but that *our* prayers are powerful and effective?

Friends, it's because we have a mediator better than Moses! A mediator is a go-between. Someone who steps into the breach. Kinda like a goalie, though not like one that sits down in the grass and picks clover when the ball is coming straight at their face! But one like what Moses did on behalf of the Israelites who broke God's law. Moses was a mediator. He stepped into the breach and interceded for the Israelites. But we have a mediator better than Moses.

You know who it is? It's God's one and only Son, Jesus Christ. He is not only a better mediator than Moses but the mediator of a new and better covenant—of the gospel instead of the law! Jesus Christ is the eternal Son of God who came into this world to step into the breach caused by all our violations of God's law. Jesus Christ came on a mission to continue to the very end to perfectly fulfill the good and holy will of his Father in every way. Then having kept all of God's commandments throughout his entire life, not just outwardly but even in his innermost thoughts, Jesus steadfastly proceeded to the cross on Calvary where he bore the furious full brunt of God's wrath against human sin, accepting our punishment as his own and putting into maximum effect the new covenant of God's amazing grace. Jesus was like a goalie knowing that the ball of sin being kicked right at him was like a radioactive, explosive, nuclear bomb and that the only way to win an eternal victory for billions of people was not

just to deflect it away for another day but to let it completely converge upon and utterly consume him so that it wouldn't destroy us.



{Show pic} Why do we Christians make such a big deal about Jesus? Because on Good Friday at the cross he willingly stepped into the breach for us as our mediator. He came between us and the impending disaster our sins deserved. Yet he didn't just divert God's wrath, he absorbed it and extinguished it. He took our place so that we could be completely at peace with God and now have the added amazing assurance that our prayers are

powerful and effective because the holy God has become our dear Father in heaven. We are his children, fully forgiven, and dearly loved!

For who are those who are righteous in God's sight? All who trust in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of their sins—and this...completely and exclusively because of God's grace! It is Christ's perfect righteousness that is credited to us by faith in him. And what your baptism means is that you are also among those who have been clothed with this righteousness that is not your own but that which was earned for you by your Savior Jesus Christ who not only died on the cross as the atoning sacrifice for your sins but who now also lives again and is at the right hand of the Father in heaven always interceding for you.

What a powerful incentive we have to pray knowing our prayers move our Father's heart of love! That's why when Jesus taught us to pray the Lord's Prayer he said to address God in this way, as "Our Father." Through Jesus, God truly is our good, good Father. Friends, he loves you. He approves of you. He is for you. He delights to hear from you. And all you earthly fathers out there, because God is your true Father in heaven, do not hesitate to step into the breach and pray for your kids. Take them daily to our heavenly Father in your prayers. And if you're not a dad then pray for your nieces and nephews, the children of our church, the kids in your neighborhood, and our soccer campers...including the clover picking goalies. After all we have this great promise about our Savior that **"He is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them"** (Hebrews 7:25). Amen.