

A Religion Like No Other 6) With a Perfect Prayer

Hebrews 5:7-9 • 2024-03-17 • Lent Series: A Religion Like No Other • [Listen](#) online



One of modern life's frustrations is the concept of being put on hold. I'm sure most of you are familiar with the routine when you call some businesses. You are trying to resolve an issue or ask a question, but you first must pass the gauntlet of phone options. "For sales and billing press one. For questions about your account press two. For customer service press the option we will reveal only after seven other menu options." And who isn't relieved when they finally get past the auto menu and hear, "Please stay on the line and know that your call is important to us." That is usually followed by something like, "Your call will be answered in about 45 minutes. Please hold and our next available computer will be right with you to see if you are worthy to talk to a non-computer employee." Could you imagine what it would be like to have that type of a connection with God? It seems that nearly every religion in this world has some form of prayer or communicating with the divine. The Christian faith is not unique in that it includes prayer as part of our life. The major religions of this world all make use of prayer. But today we continue looking at what makes our faith a religion like no other. As we look at Hebrews 5 we see how ours is a faith unlike any other because it is one with a perfect prayer.

Being put on hold for a phone call is frustrating. But to picture the frustration that this world has with prayer you need to picture a phone without any connection. The Scriptures make clear that the Lord is the only God. And he does not answer the prayers of anyone guilty of sin. Because of sin our God has severed the connection. And we have no right to call out to him or expect him to hear and answer our prayers.

This is a sad and frightening reality. All the voices that cry out in all the religions of the world outside of the Christian faith fall on deaf ears. Every knee bent for Allah, every hand folded by a witness for Jehovah, and every tongue that calls out to every other name be it the stars, dead ancestors, or some other entity –all fail like a dropped call. They have the wrong number and are without a signal to connect. The Lord says he will not listen to any sinner's plea. And why should he answer any sinner's plea? Their sin has amassed a huge debt. They not only have failed to pay the phone bill, but they have also accrued a debt which they are unable to pay.

Speaking to and calling out to God is a privilege, not a right. It is something that a sinner could only have by God's grace. That is why God established for the people of Israel the office of the priesthood. It was only those who God had appointed and chosen that could serve as priests. It was the priest who were to represent the people and offer up sacrifices and prayers. And even these men had to ceremonially wash and offer up the blood of flocks and cattle to cover their sins. The entire system of temple worship and the priesthood emphasized that no one deserves to approach God, not even his own chosen people. It was only through the channels he had established and through the means he had set up they might dare approach his holy throne.

So how are your prayers doing? I'm sure you probably can identify with the feelings many people in ancient Israel had and many Christians still have today. You pray to the Lord, and you don't receive an immediate sign or answer. You might begin to wonder how your prayer is received. You might wonder if your connection to the Lord is firm and secure. Or like some you might begin to wonder if God has put you on hold –either because of your sins or because you didn't do enough good to deserve an answer. Both are frightening realities which expose our faults and guilt.

But the writer to the Hebrews presents us with God's perfect answer for our prayer predicament. He has us take our eyes off our own prayers and look to the perfect one. We need to consider one man and his perfect prayer life. The man, Jesus, came for a purpose and he prayed with high purpose. The reason for his coming to live among us, the writer to the Hebrews explains, is to be the priest we needed. He came as our perfect priest to offer up the perfect prayer on our behalf. *During the days of Jesus' life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with fervent cries and tears to the one who could save him from death.*

Jesus did pray throughout his earthly life. Since he lowered himself to become truly human, he also submitted the need to pray to the Father. The man Jesus no longer enjoyed the glory and direct access to the Father. He was lowered and humbled. And so he did what we all need to do. He lifted up his eyes, his hands, and his heart to heaven in prayer. We read that he often withdrew to lonely places and prayed. We have accounts of him praying publicly in front of his disciples and in front of large crowds. Prayer was a big part of his earthly life.

One night, he gathered his closest friends, three of his disciples, and asked them to join with him while he prayed. On that night his prayers were filled with passion and intensity. He told his friends that his soul was filled with sorrow to the point of death. If you have ever wondered if God knows what it is to experience dread and great need for answered prayer, consider Jesus on that night. He knew the great suffering that was going to come. He understood the prophecies that said he would be betrayed, abandoned by his disciples, mocked by the rulers and people, bound, and beaten. He knew he would be whipped and made to carry the instrument of his torture. And he knew that he would collapse under the weight of carrying his cross. He knew that he would have to be pierced by nails. His hands and feet would be stretched out on display for his torture and death.

But he also knew that he was going to face what we dread the most. He was going to be cut off from and forsaken by the Father. He cried out to the Father, "If it is possible take this cup of suffering away." The writer to the Hebrews records that he prayed to the one who could save him from death. And in his great sorrow he called out with loud cries and with tears. Sweat fell from him that night like drops of blood. He prayed like no other had ever before.

Yet he didn't turn aside from suffering and dying. He obediently included in his prayer his willingness to suffer and die. *"Not as I will, but as you will, Father."* Jesus was the perfect one and only Son of God the Father. From all eternity he enjoyed a perfect union and glory with the Father. But he chose to learn what it really meant to obey the Father. He chose to do what we could not. *"Son though he was, he learned obedience from what he suffered."*

And when he hung on the cross, after everything prophesied had been completed and his suffering had reached its goal, he cried out, *"My God, My God, why have you forsaken me."* He became obedient to death, but never ceased to pray to the one who could save him from death. Jesus gave a loud cry and breathed his last. But before that he confidently proclaimed on the cross, *"It is finished."* He had finished his task of offering up the sacrifice. He had finished his goal of presenting the perfect offering. And through it all he cried the perfect prayer.

If you ever wonder that God knows what it is like to face what you are facing you couldn't be further off from the truth. God knows what it is like to be lowly. He knows the weakness of human flesh. He knows the pain of rejection. He knows the pain of betrayal. He knows the pain of abandonment. He knows the pain of missing a Father's love. He knows the agony of physical torture. He knows what it feels like to be truly all alone and feeling like God has turned his face away. Jesus is the Son of God. But he experienced and learned what it means to perfectly obey and to suffer. You have a high priest who understands your weakness.

"He was heard..." The Father did not fail to answer his prayer. In the garden when he prayed an answer came as angels came to strengthen him according to his human nature. And later, even though Jesus died and gave up his life, death did not overcome him. He was raised to life on the third day. And his prayer was answered!

"He was heard because of his reverent submission." We are not heard on account of our disobedience. We dare never claim that God owes us something and must answer our prayers because we deserve it. But Jesus did not deserve death. He submitted perfectly to the Father's will. As mentioned earlier in this letter Jesus was just like us but was without sin. He remained holy and perfect to the very end. And the perfect prayer from the perfect man was heard!

Every other religion has a god who demands something from us to hear our prayer. Every other god demands a price so that we might have our prayers answered. With all other religions empty promises abound. But ours is a faith unlike any other. God gives everything. He met the obedience for us. He made the prayer for us. And he promises in grace to answer us because of the work of our great high priest, the perfect Son.

The 1989 movie "Glory" is about the first black regiment during the civil war. The union quickly found eager recruits to fight for their cause. The movie depicts a black man, Thomas, who is friends with the commanding officer. When the man learns that his friend Robert will be leading the first black regiment, he eagerly enlists. But Thomas soon learns that just because he is friends with the commanding officer that doesn't mean he will get special treatment. When Thomas tries to talk to his friend Colonel Robert, he learns through many trials what it is like to not just be in the military, but to have no special favoritism over the other troops simply because he is friends with the commanding officer. One of the more moving scenes in the film involves that newly enlisted officer asking his friend Robert, the commander, if he can tell him something. His friend, the commanding officer says, "Yes, you may speak. What is it?" Thomas simply says, "Merry Christmas, Robert." Colonel Robert responds with a bittersweet exchange that only can last for a moment, "Merry Christmas, Thomas." They both understand the importance of military protocol.

Imagine if that's what it was like between us and our God. Think of how isolated and lonely that would make you feel knowing that God would not allow you to even speak to him without making a special appointment. It's hard for us to imagine what that would be like. The reason it is hard for Christians to picture is because we do have access! The Son enlisted, so to speak, to fight the battle for us. And his status for a time was lowered beneath even the angels who had access to the throne. He walked in lowliness as a man. And he followed and kept all his marching orders in perfect humility. He learned what obedience is like by fully experiencing it. On the battlefield he fought as the perfect victor, the perfect soldier. He served as the perfect priest. He made the perfect prayer. And his prayer was answered.

"And, once made perfect (i.e. completed his goal), he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him." We who obey him now are those who confess him and trust in him. And we follow where he has gone with a perfect prayer. He is the source of our salvation. He completed his goal. He offered up the perfect prayer.

Now we can be sure our prayers in his name will be heard. We can be sure that the one who prays, "Lord, have mercy on me for Jesus' sake," receives what Jesus has won. He paid the bill. He opened the way. He is our source of eternal life. What is the perfect prayer? It is the one spoken by Christ on our behalf and it is every prayer we make in his name. Ours is a religion like no other. It has a perfect prayer.