

Chapter 7

Intercession

- A Pregnant Sigh, a Sign of Hope -

In the last chapter we looked at Fatherhood. This chapter will emphasise the "Motherhood" factor of intercession. Our "Fathers'" lives and prayers portrayed three essential elements of intercession.

a) Identification

b) Suffering

c) Authority

Just as the word became flesh and dwelt among us so God seeks those who will identify with the lost situations of this world. Christ our Saviour was willing to share in the flesh and blood of humanity, to identify with our weakness, and to be *"tempted in every way, just as we are"* (Heb 4 :15).

His ultimate identification was in His sharing of our own lost ness and separation from God.

*"..he poured out his life unto death,
and was numbered with the transgressors.
For he bore the sin of many,
And made **intercession** for the transgressors."* *Is 53 :12*

Christ was the one to whom the prophet Ezekiel looked ahead, the one who would identify, or "stand in the gap", on behalf of a people.

*"I looked for a man among them who would build up the wall and stand before me
in the gap on behalf of the land so that I would not have to destroy it,.."*
Ez 22 :30

True identification inevitably leads to suffering.

This must not be sought out in the flesh but can only be received by the leading of the Spirit. For example Rees Howells, the "Father" of our previous chapter was led to identify with the tramps and homeless people as he prayed for them. This identification led him to a specific lifestyle of sharing and living with them in their needs.

True intercession will always take us beyond mere words and into a sacrificial lifestyle.

The sacrifice and suffering however leads us to genuine authority in prayer.

An outstanding modern example of this is the life of Nelson Mandela in South Africa. As a prisoner on Robben Island he was subjected to 27 years of hard labour. Day after day he had the soul destroying task of breaking rocks. The opposition wanted to break his spirit and fill him with hatred and bitterness. Desmond Tutu, in his book *"No Future Without Forgiveness"* makes the following comments:

"It would be easy to say that those twenty-seven years were utter shameful waste: just think of all he could have contributed to the good of South Africa and the world. I don't think so. Those twenty-seven years and all the suffering they entailed were the fires of the furnace that tempered his steel, that removed the dross. Perhaps without that suffering he would have been less able to be as compassionate and as magnanimous as he turned out to be. ***And that suffering on behalf of others gave him an authority and credibility that can be provided by nothing else in quite the same way.*** The true leader must at some point or other convince her or his followers that she or he is in this whole business not for self-aggrandisement but for the sake of others. Nothing is able to prove this quite as convincingly as suffering."

Going lower takes us higher ! Ephesians 4 :9-10 puts it another way.

"What does "he ascended" mean except that he also descended to the lower, earthly regions ?He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe."

People who genuinely suffer for Christ gain authority. We need to learn to break our rocks patiently and with dignity until the Lord releases us to His purpose. We are not necessarily called to great works of intercession. Even the small trials and obedience of each day add to this discipling. The apostle Paul elevates the whole notion of Motherhood to the level of authority to bring salvation :

"But women will be saved through childbirth, if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety". 1 Tim 2 :15

The only way to make evangelical sense of this verse is to see it in the light of intercession and authority.

Every Mum is an intercessor !

This moves us forward into our theme of the "Motherhood factor", or, **birthing Christ through intercession – the power and the pain.**

Let's consider a few key verses :

" All these are the beginning of birth-pains. " Mat 24 :8

"To the woman" he said,

*" I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing ;
with pain you will give birth to children." Gen 3 :16*

Redeeming the fall through the "gift" of labour pains, suffering, intercession. Linked to Gen 3 :15 which speaks of Christ's intercessory victory over Satan.

" But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favour with God. You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob for ever ; his kingdom will never end." " Luke 1 :30-33

" We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time.....In the same way , the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray , but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. "

Rom 8 :22,26

The natural world, frustrated by decay, is our ally in intercession. Today (27.12.03), as we mourn over 20,000 Iranians killed in an earthquake along the strategic silk road area, I wonder if such earthquakes are part of **creation's intercession in the cosmic battle between Christ and Satan.**

*"Sing, O barren woman,
you who never bore a child ;
burst into song, shout for joy,
you who were never in labour ;
because more are the children of the
desolate woman
than of her who has a husband. " Is 54 :1*

*" My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you,.. " Galatians 4 :19 **Apostolic Intercession.***

*" But the Jerusalem that is above is free, **and she is our mother.** " Gal 4 :26*

" A great and wondrous sign appeared in heaven : a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet and a crown of twelve stars on her head. She was pregnant and cried out in pain as she was about to give birth....The dragon stood in front of the woman who was about to give birth , so that he might devour her child the moment it was born. She gave birth to a son, a male child, who will rule all the nations with an iron sceptre.. " Revelation 12 :1-5

Question : Who is the woman in Revelation 12 ?

Different traditions emphasise different aspects.

Is she the Church ?

Is she a " Mother ", like Mary and Eve ?

Is she Israel ?

The classic interpretation is that she represents Israel, with the " desert " period and being saved from the waters reminding us of the famous Exodus story. Israel gave us Christ. Other commentators would emphasise that in the " new alliance " she represents the Church while I've read others who have chosen the " Mother " option. Let's cast a brief glance over these three options in the light of intercession.

Israel

We need to go back to *Genesis 32 :22* to find the beginnings of Israel's name. We find Jacob wrestling with " the man ".

" I will not let you go unless you bless me. "

v :26

This is the language and posture of intercession.

He is broken in the process :

" he touched the socket of Jacob's hip so that his hip was wrenched as he wrestled with the man. " v :25

" The sun rose above him as he passed Peniel, and he was limping because of his hip. " v :31

" Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have struggled with God and man and have overcome. "

v :28

Israel means "he struggles with God.", and Israel, with the great prayers of Abraham, Moses, David and the prophets have always been **an intercessory people. It is the key to understanding their persecution by the dragon throughout history.**

The Church

We are a people called to pray. The early apostles set the identity of the Church and Paul, like a Moses of old, wrote down the grace principles in his letters and his life.

In one word Paul modelled **intercession**. The end of Romans 8 and the beginning of Romans 9 is a hinge on which Paul's intercessory heart swings.

"...neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

v :39 (last verse)

He is emphasising the "no separation" love he knows of Christ...and yet he is prepared **to go beyond promise into the realm of intercession**, the realm of identification and suffering for his own people.

"I speak the truth in Christ - I am not lying, my conscience confirms it in the Holy Spirit - I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, those of my own race, the people of Israel."

v :1-4 (first verses)

Christ's living body on earth also modelled the obedience of intercession.

"During the days of Jesus' life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission."

Hebrews 5: 7

He had a ministry of tears.

Before a waiting and watching world, imprisoned in the depths of sadness and suffering, the Church, the body of Christ, stands. **May the multitudes see our tears rather than our triumphalism !**

The true Church has always embodied intercession and held the people of Israel in her heart. This true bride has also been persecuted throughout history by the dragon.

Mother

I think that every mother, every single one who has given birth and known the waiting, the carrying and the labour pains, knows something about intercession and the bringing forth of life. The "heavenly" Jerusalem is both bride and mother and seems to bring the three elements of Church, Israel and "Woman" together. Salvation and the ultimate destruction of Satan and evil comes from the woman's offspring. (*Gen 3 :15*)

It is no wonder that history shows immense persecution and humiliation of the female race and the poverty and abuse of her delicate offspring, as "the old serpent" has held his grudge and his fear. The young Jewish maiden Myriam or Mary, for many, has become a symbol of the ultimate victory of the woman, humbly holding out a faithful heart and bringing forth Christ, the Word, into flesh by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Every beautiful truth is opposed. Even Christ has the sad reality of " anti-Christ " and the humble, pure, truth of " Mother, Woman, Eve and Mary " is opposed by an opposite force which is difficult to truly name but is illustrated in the Bible by the false Bride/Prostitute of Babylon. Jeremiah speaks about " the Queen of Heaven " (*Jer 44 :17*), and many other commentators have developed the idea of a spirit of Jezebel (*Rev 2 :20*). Let us not allow the fears and prejudices to blind us from the beauty of **the true intercessory spirit that lived in Mary's humble Jewish heart**. Like Paul she is a true intercessor, identifying and praying for the ministry of her son. Simeon recognises this in her and gives a New Testament definition of intercession.

*" Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, **his mother** : "This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. **And a sword will pierce your own soul too.**" "*

I probably need to calm a few fears by saying that I do not believe that Mary's intercession was on the same redemptive level as Christ's unique intercession (*Is 53 :12*). However Christ's gift to His people throughout history has been the honour of sharing in His longings for the extension of His Kingdom on earth. Surely Mary, as many others, have their special place in that.

So, who is the woman of Revelation 12 ?

She is the people of God throughout history, in living intercession, bringing in Christ's reign to the nations.

God is longing to see this great sign of intercession in His people today.

It is only too easy to see the sign of Satan's destructive hand on history but underneath the tragic tapestry of this earth we will see how intercession has woven a redemptive history of hope throughout the ages and into eternity.

To finish it is interesting to see how creation " helps " the intercessors. Over the years of visiting Africa I've benefited from their more " animistic " worldview which doesn't compartmentalise life as our Western perspective does. Mankind, the spirit world and creation flow easily together. Sin affects all these areas. Hebrew thinking was also more like this with land spewing out its inhabitants when they polluted it with sin and evil. As I've already pointed out in *Romans 8 :22*, **all intercessors have a friend in creation**. Did you know that the trees were also praying for Christ and " the sons of God " to be revealed ? We are not alone in our groaning !

The creation comes to help the woman in *Revelation 12*.

*" The woman was given the two wings of a great eagle , so that she might fly to the place prepared for her in the desert, **where she would be taken care of for a time.** "*

Intercessors need to learn how to fly, and at least know they are more valuable than birds.

Rise up on eagles wings,
Run and grow not weary,
Having the wind of **hope** in our feathers.

" But the earth helped the woman by opening its mouth and swallowing the river that the dragon had spewed out of his mouth "

What has the devil spewed out of his mouth against you ? Allow communion with creation and Christ to open a " greater mouth " to swallow up all that is foul and hurtful.

*" The Lord is my shepherd, I shall lack
nothing.
He makes me lie down in green
pastures,
he leads me beside quiet waters,
he restores my soul. " Ps 23 :1-3*

Many people are keen to speak about the end times and their signs at this moment in history. We read harrowing accounts of the beast and those who will carry his mark on their foreheads. (Rev 13 :16). However the people of God receive a more noble marking. (Rev 7 : 3-4). What will be your mark in these times ? Ezekiel speaks about those who were "marked for intercession", and this, surely is our ultimate call and destiny for times such as this.

"Go throughout the city of Jerusalem and put a mark on the foreheads of those who grieve and lament over all the detestable things that are done in it." Ez 9 :4.

May the true sign of the end times be a Church identifying with the "still sad music" of humanity, and yet rising to transfigure the wounds through sacrifice and intercession.

Our suffering may well wound us deeply and every intercessor needs to know the healing balm of Christ's love. It's no good praying out our hate and bitterness before the throne of God !

As the apostle John wept deeply for a solution to history a marvellous revelation was given to him. He "went deep and touched a heart, the heart of God". Revelation 5: 6 is a profound revelation of the heart of God.

"Then I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing in the centre of the throne, encircled by the four living creatures and the elders."

God's heart, Christ himself, has carried eternal wounds of suffering. And yet, far from being infected weeping wounds of bitterness, a source of misery and desolation, such scars are transfigured by sacrificial love to become emblems of victory and the subject of angel's worship.

*"And they sang a new song:
"You are worthy to take the scroll
and to open its seals,
because you were slain,
and with your blood you purchased
men for God
from every tribe and language and
people and nation..." (v.9)*

*"Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain,
to receive power and wealth and
wisdom and strength
and honour and glory and praise !..." (v.12)*

*"The four living creatures (our intercessory ally, creation ?) said, "Amen",
and the elders fell down and worshipped." (v.14)*

Allow the Lord to heal your "slainess." Rock breaking in the pioneer fields of mission, on the oft rugged paths of work and family or on the saintly shores of church life can leave our hands blistered and bruised. Offer such hands to the Prince of love who will beautify them through intercession.

*"Crown Him the Lord of love,
See from His hands and side,
Those wounds, still visible above,
In beauty glorified.*

*No angel in the sky,
Can fully bear the sight,
But downward bears His burning eye,
At mysteries so bright."*