

Pleading Prayer

Only the blessing of the Lord makes rich, wrote Solomon in Proverbs 10:22. It is not the quantity but the quality of what we may receive that is important, for whatever comes from God's hand is for the good of His Church and brings true joy.

Congregation, let us reflect on a great disappointment, a great setback in the life of a child of God. We are so prone to ignore the hand of God, to close our eyes to His providence and to talk about it as the world does.

But don't we see that God has something to say to us when immorality sweeps through our land? And what about the many diseases and natural disasters? The earth - as we read in Revelation - will be partly destroyed by fire. And what about all the wars and rumours of wars and oppression of God's Church? The number of countries where Christians are horribly persecuted and mistreated is increasing. These are all signs of the end times. Today we want to focus on the fact that the Lord gives signs which He Himself has revealed in His Word. Remember especially what the Lord Jesus says in Matthew 24:14: "And then the end will come." This will happen. To awaken us, to awaken the world.

Let us look at the disaster that took place around the capture of the town of Ai. We read about it in Joshua 7. Our text is in verses 6 to 9.

6 And Joshua rent his clothes, and fell to the earth upon his face before the ark of the LORD until the eventide, he and the elders of Israel, and put dust upon their heads. 7 And Joshua said, Alas, O Lord GOD, wherefore hast thou at all brought this people over Jordan, to deliver us into the hand of the Amorites, to destroy us? would to God we had been content, and dwelt on the other side Jordan! 8 O Lord, what shall I say, when Israel turneth their backs before their enemies! 9 For the Canaanites and all the inhabitants of the land shall hear of it, and shall environ us round, and cut off our name from the earth: and what wilt thou do unto thy great name?

Our theme for these verses is "Pleading Prayer".

We will focus on two main points:

First, the circumstances of Joshua and the people of Israel.

Second, Joshua's attitude and posture in prayer.

Our theme for this sermon is ‘Pleading Prayer.’ We will look at the circumstances in which Joshua prayed and then his attitude and posture in prayer. We close with considering the grounds for his prayer.

First, the circumstances of Joshua and the people of Israel.

Congregation, how confused a person can be, even a child of God. A firm confidence in the Lord, in His promises and His guidance, can be shaken to the core. I read in the Westminster Confession of Faith, Article 18, as follows: ‘True believers may have the assurance of their salvation divers ways shaken, diminished, and intermitted; as, by negligence in preserving of it; by falling into some special sin, which woundeth the conscience, and grieveth the Spirit; by some sudden or vehement temptation; by God’s withdrawing the light of his countenance, and suffering even such as fear him to walk in darkness, and to have no light: yet are they never utterly destitute of that seed of God, and life of faith, that love of Christ and the brethren, that sincerity of heart and conscience of duty, out of which, by the operation of the Spirit, this assurance may in due time be revived, and by the which, in the mean time, they are supported from utter despair.’

This last circumstance of God allowing His people to walk in darkness can occur when the Lord wants to teach us a particular lesson. The reason for darkness in a situation is not necessarily because of us, but because the Lord has a specific purpose. In the chapter we have been reading, we read of a sudden trial that shakes Joshua to the point where he really doesn't understand what God is doing. When you read the last verse of Joshua 6: " So the Lord was with Joshua, and his fame spread through all the land", you think: "Everything is going well for the people of Israel", because the meaning of this verse is that all over Canaan the people were afraid of the Israelites.

The event that triggered the special lesson in Joshua 7 is the unexpected capture of Jericho. Who would have thought that the strongest, most important city - the city that was the entrance to the Promised Land - could be taken? It was only possible to enter Canaan through a very narrow passage. It was on this passage that the Canaanites had built Jericho, and just beyond it was Ai. If the Israelites hadn't taken Jericho, they would never have been able to move on. So Jericho had to be taken - a city everyone said was too strong to take.

In fact, Joshua could not have done it if he had had to do it on his own. Even if he had many soldiers at his disposal, he would not have succeeded. He was aware of this

because the Lord himself comes to see him at the end of Joshua 5, on the eve of the siege. The Lord meets Joshua as the great prince, the great captain of the armies of the Lord. He appears as the great warrior and says: "But Joshua, if you look to me, you have nothing to fear. I, the Prince of Israel, have come to you". And then Jericho is taken as Joshua believed it would be taken.

Congregation, what the Lord promises, He does. When He says, "You will take Jericho," it will happen. And it has happened! In a most wonderful way! God Himself took that city without a single man of valour having to scale its walls. He conquered it as a gift for His people! But He attached a promise to it, that the people of Israel would continue to follow Him faithfully, and that whatever was taken from the conquered cities would belong only to the Lord and His service.

What happens next? The city of Ai is to be taken. It is not a large city like Jericho. Joshua consults with the elders and the spies about how to take this city. The plan is not to mobilise too many men. We read in Joshua 7:3: *"Let not all the people go up, but let about two or three thousand men go up and smite Ai; and make not all the people to labour thither, for they are but few"*. "Yes," they said, "we have seen that it is not a large city, so we can easily take it with a smaller army. Three thousand men should suffice. Was it wrong for Joshua, as the commander of the army, as the general, to make plans and to set a strategy? Should Joshua not have done that?"

Congregation, he certainly could. After all, the Lord had appointed him as the leader of the people to go into battle and take the land. The Lord also uses the qualifications of Joshua and his advisers. We must never say that the Lord does everything Himself. No, He uses people. We must both pray and work. It was good that Joshua and his advisers talked about their strategy and made a plan.

But what was wrong with those plans? Well, Joshua is about to find out. When the battle breaks out between the three thousand Israeli soldiers and the men of Ai, it turns out that the men of Ai are much stronger. They have much more fighting power than the Israeli soldiers thought. They are driven back in a terrible way. And at the end of the battle, thirty-six men are killed.

Joshua sees the bodies of these warriors brought in - perhaps fathers of families, perhaps married, perhaps about to be married. Thirty-six men dead. A deep sadness fell on the camp of Israel and in Joshua's heart. He loves the people dearly, and of course he feels responsible for what has happened.

How is this possible? The Lord had given Jericho into their hands without a fight, and it was a big city. No one was killed when they took Jericho. And now they could not even take a small town. It seems that the Lord was not with them in the battle against Ai.

We read in Psalter 38 verse 1:

“To Thee, O Lord, I humbly cry,
To Thee my supplication make,
To Thee I bring my sad complaint,
To Thee my bitter grief I take.”

Isn't that how Joshua must have felt? He doesn't understand why this has happened. You might say, "I know why!" Joshua will understand soon. There is a thief in the army called Achan. Earlier the Lord had made a covenant with the Israelites that if one person sinned, it would be as if all the people had sinned with him. So the Lord withdrew from the people. One person could endanger the whole nation. And that is what happened in the case of Achan.

But this is a step too far. We need to go back to the guilt of Joshua and the elders. There is a lesson here for all of us. We can be so quick to jump to conclusions. We can say, "Oh, this is happening because of this or that," or "It's the devil whispering to me," when it may be otherwise. Congregation, let me ask you a question. Do you always look at your own heart first? Do you look at your own walk? Let's put this question very honestly next to God's Word. When the Lord comes with His chastening hand, is there a reason in me or in you why He does so? Thinking in this way makes me responsible. What is my part in it?

Congregation, what is Joshua's role in all this? Well, what I don't read in chapter 7 is that Joshua consults the Lord, as the Lord Himself had commanded when He chose Joshua to lead the Israelites. We read about this in Numbers 27 verses 18 to 21. *“And the LORD said unto Moses, Take thee Joshua the son of Nun, a man in whom is the spirit, and lay thine hand upon him; And set him before Eleazar the priest, and before all the congregation; and give him a charge in their sight. And thou shalt put some of thine honour upon him, that all the congregation of the children of Israel may be obedient. And he shall stand before Eleazar the priest, who shall ask counsel for him after the judgment of Urim before the LORD: at his word shall they go out, and at his word they shall come in, both he, and all the children of Israel with him, even all the congregation.”*

Congregation, I don't read anything about this in Joshua 7! Joshua did not say to the elders, "And now we will present this plan to the Lord. We will do as the Lord commands and go to Eleazar the priest. We will have Eleazar ask the Lord if we can go up against Ai". It would not be surprising if, later on, Joshua asked, "Shall we fight against Ai?"

And may we do so?" Those are two very important questions: "Lord, may we?" and "Lord, can we do it this way?" If the Lord says "yes" to the first question, then the second question must be asked. "Can we fight Ai with three thousand people instead of all of them?" Remember that the Lord said that the whole nation had to go together when Jericho was to be taken. No one was to be left behind. Joshua's plan for Ai was a departure from what the Lord had said before. God also had to be consulted before the Israelites went to fight against Ai. And that didn't happen!

You would agree with me that if Joshua had consulted Eleazar the priest and Eleazar had presented the plan to the Lord through the Urim and Thummim, God would have said, "No, you cannot go up". Then no doubt Joshua would have asked, "Lord, why not?" But that didn't happen.

What can we learn from this? There is a lesson here that I would like to share with you. Let's be honest. The sin of adultery - a man with another woman - is an obvious sin. Or, boys and girls, if you go to a worldly place where God's name is being blasphemed, you know very well that this is against God's will. If you go to a party where blasphemous lyrics are sung, where Satan is even worshipped, you know very well that you do not belong there. It is very clear that these examples are against God's commandments. You could also call them "the big foxes" in your life.

But there are also little foxes. We read about the little foxes that spoil the vineyard in Song of Solomon 2:15. They don't attract much attention. They pass by everywhere and you do not notice them. But how do these little foxes get into the vineyard and spoil it? It's because we get used to things. We are no longer vigilant. We no longer watch and pray. Let's look at some examples:

You may have prayed earnestly for a job. Much to your surprise, the Lord answered your prayer. And the first time you had to do your job, you looked up, got down on your knees and said, "Lord, will Thou help me?" And your day went well! The second day you asked again: "Lord, will Thou help me again today?" But on the third day you didn't think prayer was really necessary. The first two days had gone very well, hadn't they? On the third day, yes, you may have prayed, but your mind was elsewhere. And on the fourth day you may not have asked at all. When things are going well, we often forget to ask the Lord because we think we can do it ourselves.

Boys and girls, you may have had to write a difficult exam. You prayed for the Lord's help and He answered your prayer. For the second exam you also asked Him for help and the exam went well. But the third exam you thought you could do it yourself. And it may be that it still went well.

Perhaps, parents, when your child was so seriously ill, you sought the Lord: "Lord, help us! We don't know what to do!" What a persistent prayer for your child when the situation seemed so serious. But then she came down with the usual flu. Yes, then you also asked the Lord to heal your child, but you also had medicine. You quickly came to rely on them. When our children are not too sick, how quickly we trust the doctor, the medicine and the nature of the illness. We often rely on people, on resources and on ourselves.

This can happen with so many things. The habits in your family, at work and at church. Yes, even in church! Then I look at myself and at the brothers of the consistory. How much did you fear your vocation at first! How much you felt your need of the Lord. But before you knew it, you thought you could do it yourself. It went well, didn't it?

Yes... How dangerous is Joshua's carelessness! And do you understand that the Lord chastised him for his own good? Joshua came to regret not asking the Lord's direction, especially as an office bearer. The Lord had told him: "Joshua, you are an example to all the people, just as Moses was an example".

Congregation, official sins are also visited by the Lord. He shows this clearly in the life of His servant Joshua. Children of God, if your close life with the Lord is about to disappear, if there is very little seeking of the Lord in your life, if there is very little persistent prayer, very little supplication: "Lord, rend the heavens! Lord, give me Thy Spirit. O Lord, that I may worship Thee. Speak to my soul by Thy Word and by Thy Spirit!" - Then how great is the danger that at some point we think we can do it ourselves, and that is when we start to rely on our experience, on the past, on our own knowledge and ability.

Think of Martha, that busy Martha. Oh, how busy she was! She thought she knew it all. And she even found it irritating that Mary stayed at Jesus' feet. She thought it would be better if Mary helped her. Martha thought she didn't need the Lord Jesus' teaching at that time. But the Lord Jesus taught her something quite different. He said to her, "Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things. But one thing is needful". - The silent listening to My Word, the silent intercourse with Me, your prayer life.

Congregation, that is what the Lord Jesus means. And how are matters with you? Must the Lord say of you: "Oh, how active are the little foxes in your life! And you don't even see them. You don't even notice. You are concentrating on the big foxes and you don't see that you are becoming less and less fruitful".

Congregation, pay attention! Take this lesson to heart! Joshua learnt from it and bowed down to God. The story we are looking at today is the application of Psalm 139:23: “Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my thoughts. And see if there be any wicked way in me; and lead me in the way everlasting.”

Therefore, congregation, take heed to the chastening hand of the Lord! God's discipline is not meaningless; it has a purpose. Not only in the lives of God's children, but also in the lives of the unconverted. They always have a purpose.

And what happens when the purpose of that discipline is ignored? It is not good, of course! Perhaps the Lord has to say to us through Isaiah: "I have struck you, but you felt no pain". Perhaps He has to say about our country: "I have struck you - with this or that judgement - and you have felt no pain. It did not hurt you, it did not bring you to Me". Maybe He hid His face to chastise you, but you felt no pain. Maybe He gave you a personal chastisement like a sickness or a loss. Have you remained in pain without asking the Lord, without seeking Him, without humbling yourself before Him?

I read in a book written by one of the Puritans: 'If the Lord has struck you, chastened you, and you are in great pain, but it has not brought you to Him, then you must expect the next blow to come. For the Lord will continue to chasten you, because you haven't learned the lesson yet. When I read this, it touched me personally.

But Joshua flees to the Lord! What a good sign that is. We can also learn from this. Joshua seeks the Lord. We read in our text: “Then Joshua tore his clothes - a sign of great mourning - and fell on his face to the earth before the ark of the Lord until the evening, he and the elders of Israel, and they cast dust on their heads.” They seek the Lord's guidance through prayer. They will present their case to the Lord. They humble themselves. Joshua begins and the elders follow.

Let us begin by singing this plea in prayer from Psalm 67, which is based on Psalm 25. As you sing, pray to the Lord: "Remember all Thy mercies manifold, tender mercies from above." Even if your circumstances seem so difficult. You may have to say, "Yes, but Lord, I see so little of that mercy. Why do I have to experience all these troubles and sorrows in my life?" Then pray, "Lord, show me Thy kind countenance. Think of His fatherly compassion and pray the words of this psalm.

1. Lord, to me Thy ways make known,
Guide in truth and teach Thou me;
Thou my Saviour art alone,
All the day I wait for Thee.

2. Lord, remember in Thy love
All Thy mercies manifold,
Tender mercies from above,
Changeless from the days of old.

3. Sins of youth remember not,
Nor my trespasses record;
Let not mercy be forgot,
For Thy goodness' sake, O Lord.

4. Just and good the Lord abides,
He His way will sinners show,
He the meek in justice guides,
Making them His way to know.

5. Grace and truth shall mark the way
Where the Lord His own will lead,
If His word they still obey
And his testimonies heed.

2. Our second point is Joshua's attitude and posture in prayer.

Congregation, what do we see in Joshua's attitude when we hear him praying in our text? This is very important. Well, first of all, we find him praying in a special place. He doesn't just pray anywhere. No! And this is very important. He goes to the ark. The ark of the Lord, our text says. The Ark of the Covenant. Joshua knows - this is where I must seek the Lord. The ark that the priests carried before us across the Jordan.

This ark is the image of the Lord Jesus Christ! Our prayers can only be answered for Jesus. That's why we end every prayer with these words. There is no access to God except through Christ, through the Ark of the Covenant, of which Jesus is the fulfilment. He is the great Advocate to whom we should offer our prayers: "Lord Jesus, will Thou hear me, will Thou take away my sins before the Father? Will Thou wipe them away?"

John points to this in 1 John 2 verse 1 where he says, "And if any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous." John is speaking to children of God who are struggling with sin. John says this: "Look up to the Advocate in heaven, who stands before His Father and is always heard: for Jesus' sake".

People of God, this looking up to the Advocate in heaven must come first. Where do you look when your circumstances seem bleak, when there are challenges and difficult paths to walk? Where do you look then? Do you look to the Lord? Or are you looking for help in the wrong place? It is possible to get caught up in all kinds of human reasoning and not go to Him. But who else should we go to? The disciples said, "To whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life" (John 6:68). Thus they came to need Him in all things.

Joshua does not go to the ark alone. He takes the elders with him. Their situation is a matter for the whole congregation. This is also a lesson for us. If all goes well, we seek the Lord personally in our inner room several times a day.

But the Lord also wants to be worshipped by us as a congregation and to be asked for His help and support. Do you see how necessary it is to gather together on Sundays to present the needs of the congregation to the Lord? This is when the pastor or serving elder is the voice of the congregation. Then we can bring those needs to the Lord. Congregational prayer is so important.

We read that the elders went with Joshua. And later in God's Word we also see the church coming together with one accord to pray to the Lord for boldness in the face of persecution, to pray for the gift of the Holy Spirit. Collective prayer is a recurring theme in the Bible.

We also see Joshua lying still before God. He is silent. Congregation, when our grief is so great, sometimes we have to be silent. David said in Psalm 39 verse 9: "I was dumb, I opened not my mouth, for thou didst it." But the Lord sees this silent prayer, because a prayer without words is still a prayer.

Notice how Joshua lies down before the ark: flat on the ground, face to the ground, with dust on his head - a sign of great sorrow and humility. Do you think this was not really necessary for Joshua? Do you think it doesn't matter where you sit to pray? Does it matter, boys and girls, if your mum or dad says, 'Now we are going to pray' and you look around or have fun with someone? The Lord is very displeased with that because He is a great and holy God. Do you realize that?

Congregation, let's also be careful not to be casual in our prayers. Watch your prayer posture! How do we approach the Lord? We are talking to a holy God, a just God. Notice how the Bible saints pray. Joshua lies flat on the ground. Later, Elijah does the same: he lies with his head between his knees. And what about the Lord Jesus? He crept into the garden of Gethsemane like a worm and not a man when He prayed to His Father. Can we then have an irreverent posture in prayer?

Remember the Pharisee who stood proudly in the temple before the face of God. And he said, "Lord, I am actually doing very well, and Thou canst be very pleased with me". His whole attitude was one of pride, not humility. But the tax collector was beating his chest. He did not even dare to look up at the Lord and said: "O God, be merciful to me the sinner" (Luke 18:13). So watch your habits and your attitude in prayer. What is experienced inwardly will be seen outwardly.

Going back to our text, it says in Joshua 7 verse 6: *“And Joshua rent his clothes, and fell to the earth upon his face before the ark of the LORD until the eventide, he and the elders of Israel, and put dust upon their heads.”*

He lay there until evening. This is also significant. What is meant by "the evening"? Until it got dark? Until night fell? No. When God's Word speaks of 'the evening' in connection with the tabernacle and the service of the Lord, it always refers to the evening sacrifice.

What a rich thought, is it not? Outside the sacrifice there is no atonement. Without the sacrifice of Jesus, God cannot hear us. This is also the case in our text. Daniel will do the same later in the Bible. When he bows down before God three times a day, he also does so at the times when the sacrifices were offered in Jerusalem. At the time of the morning and evening sacrifices, with his face towards Jerusalem.

Elijah does the same. When will he build his altar and pray to the Lord? When the evening sacrifice is offered in Jerusalem - at three o'clock in the afternoon. They were anticipating the sacrifice! And that sacrifice points to Christ. No one else.

What does Joshua pray for? What are the words that come out of his lips at the end? Well, congregation, we read that in verses 7 to 9. His prayer doesn't make much sense, does it? If we look at it honestly - is it a beautiful prayer? Is it a good prayer?

In verse 7 we read: *“And Joshua said, Alas, O Lord God.”* His prayer begins well: Lord, Lord, God of the Covenant; God Who is our hope. But then things go wrong. *“Wherefore...”* Why? Joshua asks.

Do you hear the why question? *“Wherefore hast thou at all brought this people over Jordan, to deliver us into the hand of the Amorites, to destroy us? Would to God we had been content and dwelt on the other side Jordan! O Lord, what shall I say, when Israel turneth their backs before their enemies!”* One big complaint!

In fact, Joshua says: *“If only we had stayed in the desert. We should never have crossed the Jordan on Thy authority. This will be our downfall! We are in a trap. Lord, Thou dost understand, do Thou not? Now Ai has won the battle. Now the other cities will say: “The people of Israel are not so strong after all! These people are very easy to defeat. Their God seems to have left them. Their God doesn't help them any more.”*

Congregation, in Joshua's prayer we hear a great lament, a great question: why? Perhaps you recognise this question: “Lord, why hast Thou done this in my life?” Perhaps you ask: “Why didst Thou give me children and then take them away? Why didst Thou give me a husband or wife and then take them away? Why?” This is just one example from everyday life.

“Why?” This is a question of unbelief. Yes, even Joshua asks the Lord this question. In fact, he says the same thing as the spies and the people of Israel who said: “It would have been better for us to stay in Egypt.” This is wrong of Joshua. And yet, the Lord does not punish Joshua. That's amazing!

Why not? Why doesn't the Lord send down fire from heaven and say, “Joshua, what are you doing? That was such a sinful prayer.” Why doesn't the Lord do that?

Ah, congregation, the Lord knows the heart from which this prayer is coming. Joshua doesn't see everything so clearly anymore, we would say. Joshua is so shaken, so discouraged, and so desperate that he begins to say things that he does not really mean. Is it true that he doesn't really mean it?

Indeed, he doesn't mean that at all. You can see that later because he eventually moves on to pray about something completely different. Later, Joshua talks about the name of the Lord. We read in verse 9: “For the Canaanites and all the inhabitants of the land shall hear of it, and shall environ us round, and cut off our name from the earth: and what wilt thou do unto thy great name?”

It's for Thy name, Lord! That's what Joshua is worried about. He tells the Lord: Thy honor is at stake! And even though Joshua began his prayer in the wrong way, the Lord was willing to forgive him. He looks into Joshua's heart. He sees faith in Joshua. He sees that Joshua trusts in His great name and that Joshua wants to defend God's glory.

Congregation, you see this a lot in the Bible. I'm thinking of the New Testament. Zechariah is punished for his unbelief when he says, “Yes, but it is not possible to have a child, is it? Elizabeth is old; she cannot have a child.” And similarly, Mary asks: “How is this possible? How can I conceive unless I am married and have intercourse with a man?” Mary and Zechariah each ask a question. But Zechariah's question comes from a heart of unbelief, while Mary asks out of wonder and ignorance. Mary asks, “Will you tell me how?” What matters in these questions is the heart. That's what's important in our text.

And how gracious the Lord is, even when it comes to our prayer. Maybe you often say when you get up from your prayer, “Oh, that was so jumbled. I just stuttered, and the sentences tumbled over each other.” One of the disciples of the Lord Jesus asked: “Lord, teach us to pray” (Luke 11:1), because we cannot do it on our own.

Oh, how often in the Gospels we meet people who didn't know how to pray either. People like the Canaanite woman, people who cried out: “Lord, Thou Son of David, have mercy on me” (Matth.15:22).

Sometimes the people in the Gospel stories didn't even say anything. But then the Lord responds: “Your faith has saved you” (Mark 5 verse 34), or to the paralyzed man: “Son, be of good cheer, your sins are forgiven you” (Matthew 9 verse 2). Jesus knows what is in our hearts.

Congregation, we so often pray wrongly. Voetius, like Hellenbroek later, writes: 'Yes, we pray for stones, and then the Lord gives us bread. We pray for scorpions, and then the Lord gives us eggs. This is how the Lord deals with us. He gives so much more than what we ask or think. If the Lord would act according to the merits of our prayer, how often would we be disappointed.

Come, my soul, thy suit prepare,
Jesus loves to answer prayer;
He Himself has bid thee pray,
Rise and ask without delay
Thou art coming to a King,
Large petitions with thee bring,
For His grace and pow'r are such,
None can ever ask too much.

I say it again: The Lord looks at the heart. What is it like inside? For He knows our frame; He remembers that we are dust. It's not so bad if you can't put all your thoughts and desires into words. Not really! Maybe you are jealous of the pastor or elder who can always say it so beautifully. But that's not the point. What matters is whether it comes straight from your heart. Isn't that how it is in our ordinary lives? Then we often say: "I don't care how you say it, as long as it comes from your heart.

However, this does not mean that we should not prepare for our prayers. That is why the Lord Jesus taught us the Lord's Prayer and instructed us to pray this prayer. Luther wrote a separate letter about how we should pray. In it, he says that we should use the Lord's Prayer as the structure of our prayer. Then we can bring all kinds of things before the Lord on the basis of His prayer.

Congregation, Romans 8:14 teaches us that Joshua was led by the Holy Spirit, for it says, "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God." And when the Holy Spirit leads us, He also prays for us with groanings beyond words, as we can read in

Romans 8:26. It is this Spirit that teaches us to pray and to groan. If you do not know how to pray, ask the Spirit to teach you and pray, "Grant me, Lord, this spirit of prayer."

Finally, consider what the basis of Joshua's prayer is.

Congregation, have you noticed how strong the foundation of Joshua's request is? Joshua is not saying, "Lord, I am such an experienced general. We are such a good people and we have been so faithful in following Thy commandments." No, we don't hear that at all, because those are worthless arguments. Instead, Joshua is pleading God's name when he asks, "What wilt Thou do with Thy great name?" He says, "Lord, I have nothing to plead with, but Thy name." In that name is the whole person of God. This name is so holy and so good. That name is truth.

When the Lord leads you this way, you also begin to imitate what Joshua prayed. Then you say: 'Lord, I am such a wretch. Thou listeneth to a poor in spirit, and such a sorrowful in heart Thou wants to comfort. And he who comes to Thee in such a frame will by no means be cast out by Thee.'

We read in Joshua 7 verses 10 to 13: *“And the LORD said unto Joshua, Get thee up; wherefore liest thou thus upon thy face? 11 Israel hath sinned, and they have also transgressed my covenant which I commanded them: for they have even taken of the accursed thing, and have also stolen, and dissembled also, and they have put it even among their own stuff. 12 Therefore the children of Israel could not stand before their enemies, but turned their backs before their enemies, because they were accursed: neither will I be with you any more, except ye destroy the accursed from among you. 13 Up, sanctify the people, and say, Sanctify yourselves against to morrow: for thus saith the LORD God of Israel, There is an accursed thing in the midst of thee, O Israel: thou canst not stand before thine enemies, until ye take away the accursed thing from among you.”*

See? The Lord answers Joshua in this passage. He answers! He will certainly answer everyone who seeks and lives for Him.

Amen.

Closing Psalter 45.