

## PRAYER: What Difference Does It Make?

*"The Power of Prayer"*

February 5, 2023

**INTRO.:** This morning we are concluding our 4-part series, **PRAYER: What Difference Does It Make?** We began this journey with examining **The Purpose of Prayer**. To Bring Glory to God (an opportunity for the greatness of God to be on display); To Get to Know God Better (we looked at the account when Jesus visited Mary & Martha. Martha was running all around doing the preparations and she asked Jesus to intervene and tell Mary to help because Mary was just sitting at the feet of Jesus listening to Him. Jesus' response: "Martha, Martha, you are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her."); and To Develop Dependency on God (God wants us to come as little children. Was anybody reminded of this by looking at a Play-Do container?) Then two weeks ago we looked at **The Priority of Prayer**. We often say about things "I just don't have enough..." Time (clocks) Why should prayer be a priority in our lives? It begins with the character of God: He is perfect, totally without sin. He is so unlike us in this way! He knows everything and is eternal. God is all powerful and we would do well to remember all that He did as recorded in the pages of Scripture and in our lives. The second reason we should make prayer a priority is because of the example of Jesus Christ, God the Son. He taught about prayer, and He often prayed to the Father. If Jesus saw the need to communicate with God the Father, what does that tell us. Thirdly, prayer should be a priority because of the commands and teaching of the Bible. It is God's will (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 that we:

\*Be joyful always; \*Pray constantly, continually; \*Give thanks in all circumstances

These are all present tense commands! Jesus taught a parable on prayer that taught men ought always to pray and not give up. The Apostle Paul mentioned often that he was praying for those to whom he was writing. There was a sense of urgency to pray. So, how is it going in your prayer life?

Last week we examined 12 hindrances to prayer, including Not knowing Jesus Christ as my Savior and Lord and unconfessed sin. If you missed any of the messages, there are notes by the doors as you leave the church. I would encourage to pick up notes each week as you enter the sanctuary. That brings us to this morning's message, **The Power of Prayer**. Do you and I truly believe that prayer is powerful and what does the Bible have to say about this topic? I think deep down many people recognize there is something to praying. Often, it is during the most difficult times and huge tragedies. My hope today is that this would be a very encouraging message to all of us. I was certainly encouraged as I studied and prepared to share these truths. There are 3 things we will look at this morning: **Prayer is Miraculous, Prayer is Effective, and Prayer is Life-Changing**. We are going to look at 3 different passages, one for each major point.

### **PRAYER IS MIRACULOUS**

I want us to begin by reading together Ephesians 3:14-21. As we read I want you to think how the Apostle Paul points out the miraculous nature of prayer.

**Ephesians 3:14-21** For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom his whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name. I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.

Paul begins this section by sharing that he kneels before God the Father on the behalf of the fellow believers in Ephesus. Usually when somebody prayed they did so standing or being face down. Paul is displaying his seriousness when it comes to prayer. He prays that they may be strengthened with power through the Holy Spirit. He prays that they may be rooted and established in love and that they may grasp the immense love of Christ. He prays that they may be filled with all the fullness of God. He concludes with what is referred to as a doxology that points to why he prays to God. This speaks of the miraculous power of God and I want to go through this step by step.

*"to Him who is able:"* this is a present tense participle. Why does Paul go to God in prayer? Because He is able!! He has been able from eternity past and will always be able.

*"to Him who is able to do:"* (or *to work*) God is not unable, God is not idle, and God is not dead.

What about God? He is still doing things that are labeled "impossible." God is able to do!!

*“to Him who is able to do immeasurably.”* beyond all measure, super abundantly, infinitely more. There is no limit to the power of God. This is the One to whom we are praying!! Is this not what we struggle with so many times?

Isn't that what Sarah struggled with when the angelic visitors told her she would have a son at the age of 90?

**Genesis 18:10–15** Then the LORD said, “I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah your wife will have a son.” Now Sarah was listening at the entrance to the tent, which was behind him. **11** Abraham and Sarah were already old and well advanced in years, and Sarah was past the age of childbearing. **12** So Sarah laughed to herself as she thought, “After I am worn out and my master is old, will I now have this pleasure?” **13** Then the LORD said to Abraham, “Why did Sarah laugh and say, ‘Will I really have a child, now that I am old?’ **14** Is anything too hard for the LORD? I will return to you at the appointed time next year and Sarah will have a son.” **15** Sarah was afraid, so she lied and said, “I did not laugh.” But he said, “Yes, you did laugh.”

By the way, the son they had was named Isaac, which means *laughter*.

*“to Him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask:* there is no request too hard for God to accomplish! Read the book! Read the biographies of men and women of prayer.

I was listening to the story of Corrie Ten Boom this week on the radio. She told of the time when she was approached by a man who said he had become a Christian. This man was one of the prison guards who tortured her and many others. He was seeking her forgiveness. How could she possibly forgive him? She couldn't but as she called out to the Lord, He could give her the power to forgive.

*“to Him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine:* anybody here have a good imagination? Have you seen God do some things that have been beyond your wildest imagination?

The account of Jesus and the rich young ruler begins with the ruler asking, “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” Jesus tells him he needs to keep all the commandments which he claims he had but everyone knows he didn't. So Jesus tells him he needs to sell everything he has and give it to the poor. Then, come follow me. His stuff was his god and he couldn't part with it. So, Jesus tells this to the rich young ruler: “How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God! Indeed, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.” This causes the disciples to ask, “Who then can be saved?”

Jesus' response, “What is impossible with men is possible with God.”

*Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us:* the power that raised Jesus from the dead resides within every believer of Christ through the Holy Spirit.

### **PRAYER IS EFFECTIVE**

Now, I want to take a moment to define this word, *effective*. I don't mean that we get everything we ask for but that God hears and answers. Sometimes the answer is not what we were anticipating or hoping but God does answer.

**James 5:16** Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.

Before these verses James instructs followers of Christ to pray when experiencing suffering or trouble. When going through sickness call the elders of the church to pray over you. Many believe he is not just referring to physical sickness but spiritual challenges as well. He concludes with the need to admit our sin and pray for one another.

*“the prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective:”* When James says *righteous man* he doesn't mean a perfect person. He is describing a person who is in a right relationship with God.

**Psalms 66:18** If I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened;

**Proverbs 15:8** The LORD detests the sacrifice of the wicked, but the prayer of the upright pleases him.

*“the prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective:”* to be able, to accomplish (literally *very strong*)

*“the prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective:”* to work (where we get our word *energy*)

God works through prayer. Now, I don't totally understand how that works in conjunction with the sovereignty of God but I know it does. In case you're sitting there thinking, "I don't stand a chance because I'm not good enough when it comes to prayer. I'm certainly not the Apostle Paul." You should be encouraged to know that James provides an example: Elijah.

**James 5:17-18** Elijah was a man just like us. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years. Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops.

How was Elijah like us? (1 Kings 17-19) Let me give you an illustration from his life. He had a terrific victory over 450 false prophets who worshipped false gods. He challenged them to a duel. They would both pile up wood and put a bull on it, calling out to their god. The god who responds by consuming the sacrifice would win. He let the false prophets go first and they couldn't get any response. When it's Elijah's turn he has them pour water on the sacrifice and wood 3 times. He calls out to the Lord God once and fire consumes the wood, the sacrifice, stones, and soil. He then had all the false prophets killed. The Queen didn't like it and sends a message that she is going to kill him. Elijah runs away because he is afraid and prayed that he might die. This is right after his greatest victory. Isn't that so much like us?

Yet, this is the same man who prayed that it wouldn't rain for 3 ½ years and it didn't. Then, he prayed that it would rain, and it did. God works through the prayers of His people!! Those prayers are powerful (very strong) and effective!! Take heart, your prayers matter!!!

### **PRAYER IS LIFE-CHANGING**

I want us to read Philippians 4:4-7 in unison. See if you can pick out the commands and the truths that are life-changing.

**Philippians 4:4-7** Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! **5** Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

What do I mean by saying that prayer is life-changing? Paul begins this passage with a double command.

*"Rejoice in the Lord always:"* present, imperative

*"I will say it again: rejoice:"* when God repeats something...

Then, he states another command: *"let your gentleness be evident to all:"* a forbearing and forgiving spirit, even to those who oppose you

Paul is now going to share two more commands in verse 6:

*Do not be anxious about anything:* (present, imperative) to be pulled in different directions

The Old English root from which we get our word *worry* means *to strangle*

Isn't that so true? What happens when we are overcome with anxiousness and worry? Headaches, neck pains, ulcers, back pains. It affects our thinking, digestion, and even our coordination. (Warren Wiersbe)

What is the antidote to being anxious?

*but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God*

There are 3 different words for prayer that Paul uses here:

*"prayer:"* general word for making requests known to God and carries the idea of adoration, devotion, and worship. When we become anxious our first response should be to get alone with God and worship Him.

*"petition:"* (supplication) sharing of our needs and problems. This is an earnest prayer. Take the example of Jesus, who, when He prayed in the Garden, sweat drops of blood.

*"thanksgiving:"* showing appreciation to the Lord. The Father enjoys hearing his children say, "Thank You!"

*"present your requests to God:"* (present tense, imperative) to make known

Instead of being anxious bring everything to God, making known your requests to Him. Here is the life-changing part. As we do what God commands:

*And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.* in the midst of the most difficult things in life, prayer can bring God's peace to our lives.

*"which transcends all understanding:* (present tense) This transcends (to be better than, to surpass) all understanding.

People outside of Jesus wonder how you can possibly have peace in the difficult circumstances of life. It goes beyond natural human thinking!

John MacArthur, "It transcends human intellectual powers, human insights, and human understanding. It is superior to human scheming, human devices, and human solutions, since its source is God whose judgments are unsearchable and whose ways are unfathomable."

Gordon D. Fee, "Our prayer to the God who is totally trustworthy is accompanied by his *peace*, not because he answers according to our wishes but because his peace totally transcends our merely human way of perceiving the world. Fortunately, God's people do not need to have it all figured out in order to trust him!"

*"will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus:"* (future tense) This is a military term used of soldiers on duty. The Philippians would have been familiar with this metaphor since there were Roman troops stationed in Philippi protecting the interests of Rome.

Paul isn't saying, "Just pray and every difficulty, trial, heartache, challenge, and discouragement will go away. Pray and God will guard your heart and mind. Isn't that where we struggle the most? My mind can race in all kinds of directions and derail me. Prayer truly is life-changing!!

### **SO WHAT???**

If you and I really believe:

Prayer is Miraculous, Prayer is Effective, Prayer is Life-Changing

Then...

### **PRAYER MUST BE OUR GO TO**

Prayer can't be our last resort. Prayer must be that which we do before anything!! It's not, "all I can do is pray." Are we willing to commit to prayer being the first thing we do? Before anything and everything we do?

It begins:

\*Coming to faith in Jesus

It continues:

\*Bringing everything to God

We have an opportunity to present to you:

\*Day of Prayer: Thursday, February 23<sup>rd</sup> (prayer walk in the church to pray for the various ministries and our community) We will have times to gather as well as having the church open throughout the day for people to do the prayer walk alone or with friends.

We have a gift to give to you:

\*A small container of Play Doh which we have relabeled "Pray Doh" for a reminder that like children who love to play with Play Doh, so we need to be like children and run to the Father. Maybe you can put it in a place where someone might ask you about it and you can share your testimony.

The Elders have a desire that we become more of a Praying Church and a Praying People. This series has made a difference in my life, and I hope yours as well.

Recommended resources:

Study Bible

E.M. Bounds on Prayer

The Battle Plan for Prayer by Stephen & Alex Kendrick

Prayer A Holy Occupation by Oswald Chambers

A Praying Life by Paul E. Miller