

# Powerful Prayer

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*James 5:15-18*

## INTRODUCTION

- A. In the fall of 2005, 9-year-old Austin Blessit had to have his tonsils removed.
1. Before the surgery, an anesthesiologist came in to start an IV. He was wearing a cool surgical cap covered in colorful frogs.
  2. When the doctor started to leave, Austin called out, "Hey, wait."
    - a. The doctor turned. "Yeah, buddy, what do you need?"
    - b. "Do you go to church?"
    - c. "No," the doctor admitted. "I know I probably should, but I don't."
    - d. "Well, you should," Austin said, "because Jesus is great!"
  3. After the surgery was finished, the anesthesiologist came into the waiting room to talk to Austin's mother.
    - a. He said the surgery went well and then he added, "Mrs. Blessit, I don't usually come down and talk to the parents after a surgery, but I just have to tell you what your son did."
    - b. His mother thought—*Oh boy. What did that little rascal do now?*
      - 1) The doctor explained that he'd just put the mask on Austin when he signaled that he needed to say something.
      - 2) When the doctor removed the mask, Austin blurted out, "Wait a minute, we have to pray!"
      - 3) The doctor told him to go ahead, and Austin prayed: "Dear Lord, please let all the doctors and nurses have a good day. And Lord, please help that doctor with the frog hat start going to church. Amen."
- B. Why did little Austin want to pray before he had surgery? ***Because he understood the power of prayer!***
1. Prayer is indeed a most powerful force.
    - a. "You shall call, and the LORD will answer; you shall cry, and he will say, 'Here I am'" (Is 58:9).
    - b. "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened" (Lk 11:9-10).
  2. The Christians to whom James wrote needed to understand the power of prayer.
    - a. They certainly appear to have been Christians who were struggling greatly.
      - 1) "Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness" (1:2-3).
      - 2) "As an example of suffering and patience, brothers, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. Behold, we consider those blessed who remained steadfast. You have heard of the steadfastness of Job, and you have seen the purpose of the Lord, how the Lord is compassionate and merciful" (5:10-11). Why mention an example of patient in suffering unless these Christians were suffering?
    - b. We all know that suffering is a part of our human existence.
      - 1) In his suffering, Job declares, "Man who is born of a woman is few of days and full of trouble" (Job 14:1).
      - 2) But, you don't need those words of Scripture to know our prevalent suffering is in this world.
        - a) Many here this morning struggle with health concerns; others struggle with private sin; others worry over their finances.
        - b) All of us, in one way or another, suffer & we often suffer greatly.
    - c. In our suffering, we have the resource of prayer.
      - 1) James writes, "Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray" (5:13).
      - 2) I don't know about you, but when I'm suffering, I don't just want to pray. I want to know that God hears my prayer & that God will answer my prayer.
        - a) How can we know that God will hear & answer our prayers?
        - b) Our prayer need to be: A PERSUADED PRAYER, A PURE PRAYER, A PRACTICAL PRAYER, & A PASSIONATE PRAYER.

## POWERFUL PRAYER IS A PERSUADED PRAYER, vv 14-15

- A. Powerful prayer is a persuaded prayer—one that we pray in faith. James says, "Is anyone among you sick? Let him call Alum Creek, WV

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- for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven.”
- B. In Greek, the term for “sick” is used for both spiritual & physical illnesses.
1. The word for “sick” is often used for weakness of faith: “As for the one who is weak in faith, welcome him, but not to quarrel over opinions” (Rom 14:1).
  2. Because of the connection between illness & sin, I personally believe that the illness here is spiritual & not physical.
- C. But, that doesn’t really matter, for God has all power & it is the “prayer of faith” that saves.
1. If we desire our prayers to be powerful, they must be prayed in faith.
    - a. Js 1:5-8.
    - b. “I tell you, whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours” (Mk 11:24).
    - c. When the disciples failed to heal a demon possessed boy, he says to them, “I say to you, if you have faith like a grain of mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move, and nothing will be impossible for you” (Mt 17:20).
      - 1) The apostles who had been baptized in the Holy Spirit needed to have faith to carry out their miracles.
      - 2) If they needed faith to carry out miracles, how much faith do you suppose we need for God to hear our prayers?
  2. God doesn’t always answer prayers the way we’d like.
    - a. How many times have we prayed for a sick person to get well when he didn’t? How many times have we prayed for a loved one to come to Christ, but he never did?
    - b. We understand, I trust, that God always answers our prayers in accordance with his will.
      - 1) “This is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us” (1 Jn 5:14).
      - 2) We know that when what we pray doesn’t come to pass, God’s will is different from what we asked.
      - 3) Of course, we never know whether or not we are praying according to the will of God.
  3. If I don’t know whether if God will do what I ask or not, how can I pray in faith?
    - a. I can pray with the persuasion that God will answer me according to his will.
    - b. I can pray with the persuasion that God will do what is right.
    - c. I can pray with the persuasion that God sits upon his throne & reigns over all.
- D. Shall we pray with such faith?

## POWERFUL PRAYER IS A PURE PRAYER, v 16b

- A. Powerful prayer is pure prayer; it comes from a pure heart: “The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working.”
- B. Prayer itself does not have great power as it is working; it is the prayer of the righteous that works great power.
1. “If I had cherished iniquity in my heart, the Lord would not have listened” (Ps 66:18).
  2. “Then they will cry to the LORD, but he will not answer them; he will hide his face from them at that time, because they have made their deeds evil” (Micah 3:4).
  3. “Whatever we ask we receive from him, because we keep his commandments and do what pleases him” (1 Jn 3:22).
- C. If we want God to hear our prayers, we must be pure people—we need to be a righteous people.
1. God mightily answers the prayers of the righteous.
    - a. When Abraham lied to Abimelech about Sarah’s true identity, God appeared to Abimelech & promised to kill him.
      - 1) God said that the only thing that could save Abimelech was returning Sarah & asking Abraham to pray for him.
      - 2) We then read: “Abraham prayed to God, and God healed Abimelech, and also healed his wife and female slaves so that they bore children. For the LORD had closed all the wombs of the house of Abimelech because of Sarah, Abraham’s wife” (Gen 20:17-18).
    - b. A man of God came out of Judah to Bethel & confronted Jeroboam while the king made improper sacrifices.
      - 1) Jeroboam pointed at the man of God & commanded that he be seized. Jeroboam’s hand “dried up, so that he could not draw it back to himself” (1 Ki 13:4).
      - 2) Jeroboam then “said to the man of God, ‘Entreat now the favor of the LORD your God, and pray for me, that my hand may be restored to me.’ And the man of God entreated the LORD, and the king’s hand was

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restored to him and became as it was before" (1 Ki 13:6).

- c. Why did God hear Abraham when he prayed for Abimelech?
    - 1) God told Abimelech that Abraham was a prophet (Gen 20:7).
    - 2) Moses also records that Abraham "believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness" (Gen 15:6).
    - 3) Abraham was righteous & God heard his prayer!
  - d. Notice also that it was a "man of God" who prayed for Jeroboam. Again, God heard his prayer because of his righteousness.
2. Do you want to know this morning that God hears every prayer that you pray?
    - a. There is only one way to have such an assurance—to pray pure prayers, to pray from a righteous heart.
    - b. Are you praying from a righteous heart this morning?

## PRACTICAL PRAYER, v 17

- A. Powerful prayer is a practical prayer—it can be prayed by anyone. "Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed fervently that it might not rain, and for three years and six months it did not rain on the earth."
- B. Elijah was a man just like we are.
  1. The Greek word means to suffer like someone else; the idea is that Elijah was no different from you & me.
  2. We might be tempted to think that Elijah's prayers had more power because he was a prophet of God.
    - a. It is true that he was God's spokesman; it is true that God had chosen him; it is true that he had miraculous gifts.
    - b. Yet, none of that gave his prayer more efficacy than we can find today in prayer.
  3. Elijah prayed and brought on a 3 ½ year drought during the reign of Ahab.
    - a. King Ahab, of course, was an evil man & a horrible king.
    - b. As judgment against Ahab, Elijah says, "As the LORD, the God of Israel, lives, before whom I stand, there shall be neither dew nor rain these years, ***except by my word***" (1 Ki 17:1).
      - 1) Notice carefully that Elijah does not at all deny the possibility of dew & rain.
      - 2) However, dew or rain would only come about through his word—when Elijah prayed for the rain to stop, it stopped; when Elijah prayed for the rain to come, it came.
- C. Nothing at all separates us from Elijah.
  1. We can pray just as practically as did he.
  2. There are only two requirements for our prayers to be just as powerful as Elijah's:
    - a. We must be in Christ: "Through [Jesus] we both have access in one Spirit to the Father" (Eph 2:18).
    - b. We must also, as James writes in this morning's text, live righteously before God.
  3. As long as we are in Christ & living righteously our prayers are as powerful as Elijah's.
    - a. Think about that! We have access to the same God who stopped rain for 3 ½ years because Elijah asked!
    - b. Shall we be those who pray practically? Shall we go before God knowing that he shall hear our prayers?

## PASSIONATE PRAYER, v 17

- A. Powerful prayer is passionate prayer: "Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed fervently that it might not rain, and for three years and six months it did not rain on the earth."
- B. The Greek here is most intriguing.
  1. This literally reads: "Elijah was a man with the same affections as we, and he prayed in prayer that it might not rain."
  2. Elijah did just pray, but he prayed in prayer.
    - a. This idiom has been borrowed from Hebrew where it means to pray fervently.
    - b. The idea is that Elijah didn't just say a prayer before he went to bed, but he begged God not to send rain.
- C. There is a great need for passionate prayer.
  1. Jesus "told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart" (Lk 18:1).
  2. "Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer" (Rom 12:12).
- D. How is your prayer life this morning?
  1. Is your prayer life passionate?
    - a. Do you go before God to lay out your heartaches & your struggles and to beg God to help?
    - b. Do you take those troubles to God with passion because you know he'll hear & he'll respond?

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2. Why is it that prayers need to be passionate?
  - a. God doesn't always answer my prayers the way I want, so why bother with fervent prayer? God knows what he's going to do, so why bother with fervent prayer?
  - b. Fervent prayer demonstrates our trust in God.
    - 1) Fervent prayer is a demonstration that I don't have all the answers myself.
    - 2) Fervent prayer says that I can't solve all of my problems on my own.
    - 3) Fervent prayer says that God is far wiser than are we.
3. Are your prayers fervent?

## CONCLUSION

- A. This past week I met with a doctor in Morgantown.
  1. Tammy & I both went back to meet with her and so that we could both know what was going on and could both offer insights.
  2. The doctor asked many questions about depression, hopelessness, and suicidal thoughts in relation to my illness.
    - a. She was flabbergasted that I quickly answered all questions negatively without any thought.
    - b. I had to step out to use the restroom. While I was gone, she looked at Tammy and said, "Is he really doing this well? Is he really not depressed or hopeless or made you afraid that he might commit suicide?" Tammy said, "He's fine."
  3. It came time for all the paper & pencil tests.
    - a. I told Tammy to go back to the hotel & rest some.
    - b. The doctor showed Tammy back out of the hospital, but before she would allow the tester to come back in, she reappeared and said, "Now that your wife isn't here, tell me how depressed you really are."
  4. I simply replied, "I understand you need to ask, but my wife & I have an open relationship. I have no need to change a word I've said."
  5. With a look of disbelief on her face, she said, "Okay" and left.
- B. What that doctor failed to know is that I have God on my side.
  1. I can pray to the God who caused it to stop raining for 3 ½ years. My prayers can be heard just as Elijah's were.
  2. I have no reason to despair. I have no reason to give up. I have a God who answers prayers!
- C. Does he answer your prayers this morning?
  1. Do you have access to the Father through Christ? Are you living righteously?
  2. Do you need to come & ask for this church's prayers?