

7-11-21

Sermon- The Power of Prayer

Scripture- Ephesians 3:14-20, John 17: 1-25, CTW Ps24

Hymns- 622, 623, 625

Theme- Today we begin a five-week study on the multi-faceted nature of Prayer. The message today will be an intro to the power of prayer, covering things like the ACTS acronym, (Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, Supplication) in a study of the elements of Paul's prayer found in **Ephesians 3:14-21**.

Some people think that the only reason to pray is to cause a change in our own thinking, but...

I. The Bible teaches that prayer can make a difference in what God does, and that prayer can also have an effect on our circumstances.

A. In Ephesians 3:14-21 The apostle Paul is praying. He is praying for the Christians in Ephesus, & he is also praying for us, for all those down through the ages who come to know Jesus as Savior & Lord.

This is a beautiful, touching, wonderful prayer! But I have a question for you. Is it possible we have become so self-sufficient that we think we don't really need God anymore?

Surely not! But I'm afraid that when things are going well, we oftentimes act as if we really don't need God.

You see, if we get sick, we can call the doctor or go to the emergency room. If a natural calamity destroys our property, we can fill out an insurance claim. If company comes unexpectedly & we're short on food, we can go to the super-market.

If we run out of cash, we can use plastic. If we're having relational difficulties, we can go to a counselor. So with all this, who needs God?

B. Now most of us here obviously don't think that way. I mean, we know that we need Him! Each week we gather in His name. We sing songs of praise, & worship Him. We join

together in study of His Word. And we pray, believing in the power & importance of prayer.

Or do we pray? When we're asked during the worship service to pray for people by name, are we really interested & involved enough to pray for them during the rest of the week? Or do we believe that everyone else is going to be praying for them, so we don't need to add our prayers, too?

Do we really believe that God is a prayer-hearing & a prayer-answering God? Or do we think that God no longer wants to use His power the way He did back in Bible times? Has He just turned our lives back over to us & expects us to do the best we can with what we have – to plan carefully & then to implement our plans?

Do we talk to God & then tell Him what His answer should be? And if He doesn't do what we ask, we just don't pray any more?

C. But wait a minute! The reason we pray is not because we believe in the power of prayer. We pray because we believe in the power of God. We believe that He is the all-powerful God of the Bible, who has not put His power on hold.

Psalms 115:3 declares, "Our God is in heaven; He does whatever pleases Him." God does whatever He pleases, & He doesn't need our vote - nor does He wait for our veto.

Even King Nebuchadnezzar knew that the God of Israel had that kind of power, for he declared, "He does as He pleases with the powers of heaven & the peoples of the earth. No one can hold back His hand or say to Him: 'What have you done?'" (**Daniel 4:35**)

So if we're going to talk about prayer, the first thing we need is to realize the awesomeness of God. Some have been taught that the only reason to pray is to change ourselves. But the Bible does not teach that as a reason to pray.

Instead, the Bible teaches that prayer can make a difference in what God does, & that prayer can also have an effect on our circumstances.

II. PRAYER CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN WHAT GOD DOES

A. Do you respond when your kids make requests of you? Of course you do. So does God. He is the perfect parent as well as the powerful creator. And the Bible teaches that prayer can make a difference in what God does.

For instance, remember when God brought His people out of Egypt by those great miracles? Then after coming through the sea, they stopped at Mt. Sinai.

While Moses was having a long talk with God, receiving the 10 commandments, the people got impatient. They took off their jewelry, melted it down, poured the liquid gold into a mold shaped like a calf - & guess what they got? A golden calf!

They worshiped that calf, sang hymns to that calf, brought offerings, & declared that the calf was the god who had brought them out of Egypt.

God was not pleased! He said to Moses, "I have seen these people...& they are a stiff-necked people." Then God gave Moses a command: "Now leave me alone so that my anger may burn against them & that I may destroy them. Then I will make you into a great nation." (**Exodus 32:9-10**)

Even though God told Moses to leave Him alone, Moses immediately began to beg God not to destroy His people. **Deuteronomy 9:18** tells us that he kept begging God to spare the people.

In vs. 19 Moses said, "I feared the anger and wrath of the Lord, for He was angry enough with you to destroy you. But again the Lord listened to me."

So what happened? **Exodus 32:14** tells us, "The Lord relented & did not bring on His people the disaster He had threatened."

Isn't it wonderful that God listens to our prayers, & that prayer can make a difference in what God does? God listened to Moses & God **changed His mind**.

ILLUSTRATION: Then there was King Hezekiah. God told Hezekiah through the prophet Isaiah to get his house in order because he was going to die.

But Hezekiah prayed earnestly, & before Isaiah got out of the palace courtyard, God told him to go back & tell the king, "I have heard your prayer & seen your tears; I will heal you...I will add 15 years to your life." (**2 Kings 20:5-6**)

Some people say that God never changes His mind but listen to what God says about that.

In **Jeremiah 18:7-8** God says, "If at any time I announce that a nation or kingdom is to be uprooted, torn down & destroyed, & if that nation I warned repents of its evil, then I will relent & not inflict on it the disaster I had planned."

The lesson here is that while God will never change His goal, His desire for the redemption of mankind, He will & can change some particulars in response to the prayers of His children. He has that right, & He has demonstrated that many times in the Bible.

III. PRAYER CAN HAVE AN EFFECT ON OUR CIRCUMSTANCES

A. Not only can prayer affect God's actions, prayer can also have an effect on our circumstances because we're talking to the One who has all power - yesterday, today, & forever. In **Genesis 18:14** we read, "Is anything too hard for the Lord?"

When God was going to fill a valley full of water without any rain or wind, the prophet Elisha was told, "This is an easy thing in the eyes of the Lord." (**2 Kings 3:18**)

An angel who came directly from heaven to Mary brought this message: "Nothing is impossible with God" (**Luke 1:37**). Jesus, who knows God better than anyone, said, "With God all things are possible." (**Matthew 19:26**)

If God, an angel, the prophets, & Jesus proclaim the awesome power of God, then we who are Christians ought to proclaim it, too.

The disciples once asked each other about Jesus, "Who is this? He commands even the winds & the water, & they obey Him" (**Luke 8:25**).

B. We human beings are the only part of creation that God has given the freedom to listen to a command & then

decide whether to obey or not. Nothing else has that option. That's the reason God could say to the Red Sea, "Open up," & the sea opened up.

When Jesus commanded the fig tree to dry up, it did not have a committee meeting with other fig trees to see what to do. Any time God speaks to nature, nature has no option but to obey

Remember the battle Joshua was involved in? Daylight was running out before the battle was over, so Joshua prayed for more daylight. The Bible says that God caused the sun to stand still.

Remember when Daniel was thrown into the lions' den? The lions were starving, but when Daniel came on the scene, God closed their mouths.

Remember when Jonah was thrown overboard? The Bible says that God provided a great fish to swallow him. That fish had no option but to obey.

Jonah was in that fish for 3 days & 3 nights. I'm convinced he tried every way he could to get out - but nothing worked. Jonah finally realized that he was in a crisis & started to pray.

And as soon as Jonah finished praying, "The Lord ordered the fish to spit Jonah up onto the beach, & it did" (**Jonah 2:10** TEV).

You see, prayer does have power to affect circumstances.

III. WHAT ABOUT TODAY?

A. But what about today? Does God really continue to hear our prayers & intervene in our lives? I'm convinced that He does. Many of our missionaries have observed God's intervention firsthand.

ILLUSTRATION: A missionary named Ron Morse witnessed an example of God's intervention in Thailand. He was working with some villagers in northern Thailand, & that area was having the worst grasshopper plague that anyone could remember.

Finally, the leader of the village said to Ron, "You go back home & gather your Christians & pray for 3 weeks that the grasshoppers will leave the Christians' fields."

"If, when you return in 3 weeks, the grasshoppers have left the Christians' fields, but are still in the non-Christians' fields, I will help you lead this whole village to worship your Jesus." What a challenge!

With earnestness & sincerity, the Christians prayed. Three weeks later Ron came back to that village & was devastated by what he saw. It was obvious that the grasshoppers were still in the Christians' fields. In fact, there were more grass-hoppers in those fields.

But upon careful examination, they found that the grasshoppers in the Christians' fields were only eating the weeds - they were not touching the rice - while the grasshoppers in the non-Christians' fields were eating the rice & not the weeds.

There were so many grasshoppers in the Christians' fields that the dung, the droppings they left, fertilized the ground so well that there was an abundant harvest of rice to feed all the people there. **Folks, we have an awesome and powerful God!**

Another Missionary Jim McElroy also tells about what happened in the Philippines when he was called into a village. An infant was deathly ill. The child had not nursed for days & was turning gray. His eyes were rolled back; he was lifeless & listless, apparently just moments from death.

Jim turned to the Filipino preacher & said, "I didn't know we were coming here for a medical reason. I brought no medicine. Did you?" The Filipino preacher said "No." "What shall we do?" Jim asked. "Let's just pray."

While they were praying fervently for God's intervention, the little infant reached up & touched one of those who was praying. Before they finished praying, the infant moved toward the mother's breast & began to nurse.

The following Sunday was Easter. As Jim was preaching in a neighboring village in an outdoor assembly, he saw coming over the brink of the hill a woman carrying a baby. Behind her were over 20 adults.

As they got closer, Jim recognized the mother & the infant, who was looking very healthy. The adults had come to accept Jesus Christ & to be immersed. **We serve a powerful & awesome God, AND OUR PRAYER LIFE SHOULD REFLECT THAT!**

B. That does not mean God will always answer "Yes" to our prayers. We have all experienced the "No" answers. We must be careful lest we start to believe that we can order God around with our prayers.

God does not honor the "name it & claim it" game some people play - as if they can tell God what to do. Jeremiah, the prophet, declared, "Who can speak & have it happen if the Lord has not decreed it?" (**Lamentations 3:37**)

Our God listens carefully to our prayers, intercessions, agonies, & heartaches. But He will not permit us to dictate to Him what He has to do.

So how do we understand it when we pray for someone to be healed & that person dies? It does not mean that God loves some more & some less, or that God respects some & not others.

Psalms 103:11 says, "As high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is His love for those who fear Him."

With that great love He also declares, "My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways...As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways & my thoughts than your thoughts" (**Isaiah 55:8-9**).

I believe we can trust in a God who is that big & has that much love for us.

C. When the answer does not come exactly the way we want or expect, our faith should hold hands with the faith of those 3 men thrown in the furnace of fire, who declared:

"If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us from it, & He will rescue us from your hand...But even if He does not, we want you to know...that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up." (**Daniel 3:17**)

Our trust in the power of God continues not because we always get our way, but because we believe in the way of God!

To pray is to tap into God's power. Non-Christians do not believe that God still has power today. If Christians don't believe it, who will?

Isn't it time for us to catch up with our forefathers & believe in, teach about, & pray to the God we read about in **Ephesians 3:20** at the beginning of this sermon where it says, "Now to Him who is able to do immeasurably more than ALL we ask or imagine"?

We can imagine great things. Wouldn't a God who could accomplish "ALL" of them be a great God? Yes, He most certainly would be!

That's the power of prayer. It is the power of God! It is tapping into Him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we can possibly ask or imagine. What a God & what a privilege - to be able to talk to Him, & know that He listens to us & answers our prayers!

INVITATION TO STUDY MATTHEW 6:1-15 AND Luke 11:1-13 for next week's message on the Lord's Prayer.