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Prayer Has Potential, Part 2

James 5:13-18

Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praise. Is anyone among you sick? Let him call 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. Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working. 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. Then he prayed again, and heaven gave rain, and the earth bore its fruit.

Sometimes when I get discouraged in life, I do so because I've forgotten about the nature of God. God is good. He's kind. He's patient. He's merciful, he's loving, and he cares for us.

But I can tell you, there are things that I have come before him with, day after day, year after year, month after month, that he hasn't yet answered in the way I think he could, in line with the kingdom of God. And I sometimes grow weary in prayer when I forget about his power.

But when I remember that this God who has invited us into his presence is the the God of all eternity. Who's the ruler? Not only of of this earth, but he's the ruler of heaven and earth. He's the ruler of the cosmos. He's the one who put the stars in place.

When I'm reminded of his dunamis, his power, I'm stirred again to come before him. And he has said, keep seeking, keep asking, keep knocking. Sometimes he says no. Sometimes he says yes. Sometimes he says wait. But he always says keep persisting in prayer. Keep coming, keep knocking, keep asking, keep seeking.

And if you've grown discouraged in your heart and mind over something you're dealing with in your life today, I just want to remind you that no matter what it is, God is able. He's able to help.

When we're thinking about prayer, Jesus begins with focusing our minds on the nature of God, the true nature as revealed in the scriptures. What comes into our minds when we think about God might very well be the most important thing about us.

Do you believe that God is a God of great power, that nothing is impossible with him? Do you believe that your prayers can have an effect on him, and could even at some point change his mind?

James, the half brother of Jesus, tells us in our lesson today the prayer of a righteous person. Now, a righteous person is a person who's come into the presence of God by faith and been declared righteous through the blood of Jesus. That can be anyone, anywhere, anytime, righteous before God by faith in Christ declared clean. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it's working.

And then he gives us an example of the power of prayer. Elijah was a man just like you and I, with the same nature as us, a fallen human nature bent toward selfishness. But he, before Christ, living in faith, was declared righteous before God.

Elijah was a man with that kind of nature, walking in righteousness by faith. And he prayed fervently that it might not rain. And God responded to his prayer. And for three and a half years it didn't rain. Because this is the God who can control the weather in his dunamis and his power.

And then he prayed again. That it would rain. And the text says, Heaven gave rain and the earth bore its fruit.

When you and I are praying thy kingdom come, do we know what we're praying for? The rule and reign and power and authority of God to take over on the earth as it is in heaven?

God is a gentleman. He doesn't force his way in. He's given human beings free will to resist him, push out his reign, and live to our own way. And the evidence of that is all around us.

I recently heard the story of a foreign president. I'm not sharing the names here. Who made an appointment with a pastor in South Korea. He heard about his ministry and the way God was working there in South Korea, and he wanted to go talk to him. And he was working on developing his own understanding of God.

And he had an appointment early in the afternoon, and he arrived a little bit early during the noon hour. And the secretary at the church stopped he and his entourage and said, you know, the pastor's not ready for you yet. He's in his designated noon hour of prayer.

And the foreign president said to the secretary, ma'am, do you happen to understand who I am? Secretary said, yes, I know exactly who you are. She said, I have a question for you. Do you happen to understand or know who the pastor is visiting with? He'll be with you at one.

God is unlike any human being. He is the King of Kings, the Lord of Lords, El Shaddai, all powerful almighty. There is no one higher. And he has invited you and I into his presence through the blood of Jesus, to talk with him as a Heavenly Father.

What awesome privilege it is, what power is available to us.

When Jesus was instructing us to pray, he was inviting us to pray, your kingdom come. And then even deeper he said, pray like this. Your will be done.

When we come to God, first and foremost, we're focusing on him, his power, his authority, his agenda, his purposes, his will.

Do you know the most common word for prayer used by God in the New Testament is the Greek word *pro*. *Pro*. *Pro* means to exchange, as in a is an exchange between two individuals. *Eucommia* is to wish.

Prayer in its essence is to exchange desires, expressions, wishes with another person. My wife and I often exchange desires and express these things to each other. This is what God is inviting us to do. Come before him, express wishes, and hear his wishes, and learn from each other in an interaction with each other.

In Luke 22, Jesus gives us an example of an exchange of wishes. Jesus was in humility, found in human likeness, in appearance, as a man like you and I, walking on the earth, dealing with the challenges that we deal with.

And he knew that he was slated to accomplish a purpose for which God sent him, and it was burdening him. He knew that soon he was going to be arrested and whipped and beaten and then crucified to pay for the sins of humanity.

It's why he came. But in his humanity and the flesh that he took on, he was struggling with his calling. And so the night before he was betrayed, he went to the Garden of Gethsemane with his disciples. And he asked them to stay and wait and pray with him. And they fell asleep.

But while Jesus was praying, he drew withdrew about a stone's throw away from them, and he knelt down before his father. And he said, father, here is the exchange of wishes. If you are willing, I wish that you would take this cup from me. That's my wish.

Coming before his heavenly Father. Vulnerable. Open. Privately. Authentically. Honestly. From the depths of the secret parts of his soul. Just baring it. Here's my desires. Here's my burden.

And notice how he prayed. If you are willing, take this cup from me. He knew he was able. He just wanted to know if he was willing. But he said nevertheless. Not my will, but yours. Be done.

Prayer and its essence is a deep surrender to God. Where we learn from him, he hears from us, and we learn from him. Notice that Jesus teaching on prayer begins entirely with a focus on God, his nature, his location, his uniqueness, his preeminence, his power, his purposes, his will. And we should approach him understanding all of these things about him.

I close with an example of a kind of exchange of wishes between Nehemiah, a prophet in the Old Testament, and King Artaxerxes, who he worked for when he was banished out of Jerusalem.

He just gotten word, Nehemiah far east of Jerusalem, that Jerusalem was in ruins. The city had lost its walls, and the gates were burnt and torn down. And he was burdened deeply by this, had been in great grief over it.

And he came before the king, serving as the king cupbearer. And in Nehemiah chapter two we read, in the month of Nisan, in the 20th year of King Artaxerxes, when the wine was brought before him, I took the wine and gave it to the king, as a cupbearer does. And he said this, I had not been sad in the presence of the king before.

So the king asked me, why does your face look so sad when you are not ill? This can be nothing. The king discerned but sadness of heart. He wisely discerned where this individual was. Just as God knows where our hearts are. This can be nothing but sadness of heart.

Nehemiah said, I was very much afraid to talk honestly with the king like this, but I took the risk. He said, I said to the king, May the king live forever. I Revere you. I understand who you are. I respect and honor you.

But then he said this very honestly. Why should my face not look sad when the city where my ancestors are buried lies in ruins and its gates have been destroyed by fire?

The king heard Nehemiah's sort of prayer offering of his burden to the king. And the king said, well, what is it you want from me? Give me your wishes.

Then I prayed to the God of heaven because I was scared. Nehemiah said, I, I talked to my Heavenly Father before I said more to this king. And I answered the king, if it pleases the king. And if your servant has found favor in your sight, let him.

Here's a wish. Send me to the city of Judah, where my ancestors are buried, so I can rebuild it.

And the king said, how long will you be gone? After consulting with his wife, the king said, you can go.

And then Nehemiah took another risk boldly before the throne. When I'm going, could I have permission to get wood from the king's forest? Could I get permission to rebuild the city in writing so they'll see it's official?

And the king said, because it's in my will, or because you've changed my mind or whatever, I'm going to pour my grace out upon you as you go.

Friends, you and I have been given the opportunity to come into the presence of the King of Kings. Who has all power and all authority to ask, to seek, to knock.

I don't know where you're at today, but if you've grown discouraged with your life in some way, can I encourage you? Keep coming before the King.

If you haven't opened up your heart to Jesus, put your faith in him, and then you're invited into the very presence of God to walk with him and talk with him as a friend.

Next week, this prayer turns towards even more expressions of requests from God about our personal needs this side of eternity. I hope you'll stay with us in this series.

God has given us a great and awesome privilege to come before him, and there is power in the working of our prayers as we talk to him.

Let's pray together.

Father, I thank you for the chance to gather in this place today and come before you. I do again thank you for the shed blood of your son Jesus that gives us the opportunity to come to you anytime, anywhere.

And as we've gathered here today, I'm sure your spirit is ministering to each one of us in different ways. I pray that as a church family, as we're moving forward in faith, you would by your spirit keep drawing us closer to you, more in abiding with you, more open and honest with you, in a place of humility before you, so we could experience more and more of your grace.

And you would hear more and more of our prayers with the response of of your kindness and your mercy. Give us wisdom to pray in line with what you're calling us to, so that we could walk in your power and your strength.

Father, thank you for hearing us, for opening your ears to us and being merciful and kind to us. We pray this in the name of Jesus. Amen. Before.