

## PREVAILING IN PRAYER

James 5:16-18

1. As one makes their way through the book of James you see that he uses certain personalities to illustrate certain spiritual truths. He has used Abraham, Rahab, and Job. Now, as he comes to the close of his letter, he once again illustrates a spiritual truth by drawing our attention to another Biblical personality - Elijah.
2. Elijah is mentioned by New Testament writers more than any other Old Testament personality. His name occurs nine times in Matthew, nine times in Mark, eight times in Luke, twice in John, and once in Romans and James. When you consider the life of Elijah of Elijah, there is much about a his life that instructs and inspires. As for James, it was his prayer life that he sought to bring to our attention.
3. James has been talking about prayer and to illustrate mighty, prevailing prayer, he could not have picked a better example. Elijah was more than just a man of prayer. He was a man that mightily prevailed in prayer. What do I mean by mighty, prevailing prayer? I am talking about the kind of prayer that gets answers from God. I am speaking of the kind of prayer in which man reaches up in asking and God reaches down in answering.
4. As we read the Bible we see that prayer is to be a fact in our life. Believers are to be among many things, a praying people. Prayer is to be a custom and habit in our life. The simple truth is that any failure in our life can be traced to a prayer failure. But prayer is to be more than a fact. It is to be a force.
5. When James draws our attention to Elijah, he reminds us that prayer can be and should be a force in our life. Elijah was a man that learned to prevail in prayer. As believers, we should learn to prevail in prayer. In verse 16 we read, "The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much." He then gives us in Elijah a specific example of how the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man can prevail.

7. Let's consider the example of Elijah's prayer life by looking at it through the words, "The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much." First, notice with me:

### 1. THE PERSON OF PRAYER!

1. The first word that I draw from the statement is the word "man." Let's begin by thinking of Elijah the man and as a man. From our text we learn what kind of man he was. First, I point out that Elijah was a:

#### A. REGULAR MAN

1. It is easy for us to read our Bible and place the great saints of the Scriptures on a high and lofty pedestal. We tend to put them into categories reserved for a select few. We see them as giants among men, and in a sense they are. Yet, we must not forget they were only men -- human beings like you and me. Nothing more and nothing less.
2. Elijah was one of the most honored and revered prophets to the Jewish people. He has been called, "the grandest and most romantic character Israel ever produced." There were numerous traditions that grew up around Elijah and exaggerated opinions developed, ascribing him super-human traits. Yet, as James draws our attention to him he reminds us that he was just a regular, ordinary man. before he tells of what Elijah accomplished through prayer, he reminds us that Elijah was a man just like each one of us. We read in verse 17, "Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are."
3. Elijah had the same nature that each of us has. You could say, "Elijah put his pants on just like we do, one leg at a time." The word translated "subject to like passions" simply means, "to be similarly effected." One writer speaking of the statement wrote: "Elijah was subject to the same human emotion and liable to the same weaknesses that we all have." Another translator rendered the words, "with feeling just like ours."
4. We have the same thought in Acts 14 when Paul preached at Iconium. When he performed miracles the people began to cry out, "The gods are come down to us in the likeness of men" (Acts 14:1). The response of Paul

and Barnabas was, "We also are men of like passions with you" (Acts 14:15). Paul was saying, "We are not gods. We are only human beings like each of you."

5. In case you think that your praying could never be effective and prevailing as Elijah, remember he was just a human being like you. Elijah was a great man, but he was just a man. James reminds us of the humanity of Elijah to disarm our feelings that we could never get answers to prayer as did he. The emphasis on his likeness to all of us in an encouragement that we are praying to the same God that Elijah prayed and that God can answer our prayers as He did Elijah's. Furthermore, we not only see him a regular man, but also as a:

## **B) Righteous Man**

1. In verse 16 tells us that mighty prevailing prayer is the result of a "righteous man." Elijah may be been just a man, yet there was mark of holiness and righteousness about his life. He was a man wholly devoted to God. Oftentimes Elijah is addressed as "a man of God." He was a man committed and consecrated to God. The people of his day saw him and knew him to be a man that belonged to God.

2. I think of 2 Kings 1:10 where we read, "And Elijah answered and said to the captain of the fifty, If I be a man of God, then let fire come down from heaven, and consume thee and thy fifty. And there came down fire from heaven, and consumed him and his fifty." Elijah conditioned the answering of his prayer on the matter of he being a man of God or a righteous man.

3. God answered his prayer. If we are to prevail in prayer we must as well be righteous. What does it mean to be righteous? The word describes someone who by implication is "innocent or holy." To be righteous is simply to be right with God! To prevail with God in prayer we must be clean before God. There can be no unconfessed sin in our heart. To get an audience with God requires that we be right.

4. The Psalmist was very straight forward when he stated: "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me" (Psalm 66:18). Nothing could

said any plainer. If I have something in my heart that is not right, the Lord will not hear my prayers. If He cannot hear me, I will never get an answer.

5. I read about a Sunday School class of young girls that wrote missionaries to tell them they had been praying for them. The teacher told them that the missionaries were busy and not to expect them to answer their letter. One little girl wrote: "We have been praying for you. We are not expecting an answer."

6. When it comes to unconfessed sin in our life, there is no use to expect an answer. Mighty prevailing prayer is prayer offered from the heart of someone that is righteous. The second thing about prayer that I want you to see in Elijah is:

## **2. THE PRACTICE OF PRAYER!**

1. Notice with me the words, "The effectual fervent prayer." In these words we learn something about how we are to pray. First, we see that are to:

### **A. Pray Specifically**

1. The word "prayer" that is used could be translated "supplication." It is a word that is restricted to petitionary prayer. It describes the kind of praying where one brings specific petitions to God. There are specific things that are desired and being asked for in prayer. In verse 15 the word "prayer" that is used speaks of prayer that exclusively addressed to God but includes all types of prayer. But in verse 16 we see the kind of prayer that specifically asks God for things.

2. When you look at Elijah you find that when he prayed he asked for specific things. First, we see in verse 17 that he prayed that it might not rain. The result it did not rain. In verse 18 he prayed that it would rain and it did rain. Elijah did not pray in generalities but prayed specifically.

3. I read about this little boy that acting up in church. His dad kept telling him to sit still and be quite. Finally the dad grabbed him and started out of the church. They were about halfway down the aisle when the little boy

cried out where everyone could hear him, "Ya'll pray for me now." You could say he was being specific in prayer.

4. I think of Philippians 4:6, "Be careful for nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God." We are to let our "requests" be made known to God. The word speaks of a particular things for which we ask God. We often pray, "Lord, meet my needs." That is praying generally. To pray, "Lord, I need strength," or "Lord, will you give me a job," is to pray specifically. To pray, "Lord, bless our church" is to pray generally. To pray, "Lord, supply the money we need to build the new building" is to pray specifically. To pray, "Lord, touch my children" is to pray generally. To pray, "Lord, save Joe, bring back Ann" is to pray specifically.

5. Prevailing prayer is when we bring specific requests and petitions to God. Furthermore, we see that we are to:

## **B. Pray Earnestly**

1. The words "effectual fervent" prayer come from one word from which we get our word "energy." The word literally means "stretched out" and gives the picture of a runner stretching for the finish line with his last gasp of energy. James is telling us that if we are to prevail in prayer we must approach God with integrity and with intensity. A simple way of saying it is that we must pray with all our hearts.

2. Three preachers were talking about prayer and the appropriate and effective positions in prayer. As they were talking a telephone repairman working on the phone line was listening. One preacher said that he felt the key was in his hands. He always held his hands together and pointed them upward as a form or symbolic worship. The second suggested that real prayer was conducted on ones knees. The third suggested that the only way to pray was while stretched out flat on your face. The telephone repairman spoke up and said, "I have found that the most powerful prayer I ever made was while I was dangling upside down by my heels from a telephone pole suspended forty-feet above the ground."

3. I am sure he was praying from the heart. That is how we are to pray. We are to put ourselves into prayer. We are to pour our hearts out in prayer. The Psalm said in Psalm 62:8, "Trust in Him at all times; ye people, pour out your heart before Him: God is a refuge for us. Selah."

4. That is how Elijah prayed. He not only prayed specifically but earnestly. His prayer was more than a little prayer prayed over the food he was about to eat. He got down to business with God and poured his heart out to God. He prayed earnestly. The final thing about prayer that I point out is:

## **3. THE POWER OF PRAYER!**

1. Notice the words, "availeth much." The words literally mean, "is strong, is able to do much." The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man is able to do much in prayer. This kind of praying is powerful praying. It is the kind of prayer in which man asks and God answers. It is the kind of prayer found in Jeremiah 33:3, "Call unto me and I will answer thee and shew thee great and mighty things." This is the kind of praying we see in Elijah. He got things from God when he prayed.

2. In verses 17-18 we see described a particular occasion when Elijah prayed and God answered. The account is found in 1 Kings 17:1, "And Elijah the Tishbite, who was of the inhabitants of Gilead, said unto Ahab, As the Lord God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word." Let's look at this particular occasion in Elijah's life and what it teaches us about the power of prayer. First, we see;

### **A) What Man Must Acknowledge In Prayer**

1. The Bible tells us that when Elijah prayed it did not rain for the space of three and a half years. It is important to understand that Elijah's prayer was more than he getting his will done in heaven. The answer to his prayer was a matter of God's will being done on earth. The shutting of the heavens was an act of God's judgment on the land. The Bible does not reveal the moment, but somewhere God had made his will known to Elijah and when he prayed that it might not rain, it was after God's will.

2. It has been well said that nothing lies outside the reach of prayer except that which lies outside the will of God. We read in 1 John 5:14-15, "And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us: And if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him." It is important to understand that God answers our prayers according to HIS will and not ours. Let me emphasize that prayer is not getting our will done in heaven, but getting God's will done on earth.

3. Jesus expressed this truth when He taught us to pray, "And he said unto them, When ye pray, say, Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, as in heaven, so in earth" (Luke 11:2). It did not rain for three and half years because it was God's will. When it did rain, it was according to God's will. When we pray, our prayers must be governed and guided by God's will. Furthermore, we see:

## **B) What God Can Accomplish By Prayer**

1. Elijah prayed, "that is might not rain and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months." He prayed a second time, "and the heaven have rain, and the earth brought forth fruit." We see prayer being answered! In the answers we see to Elijah's prayer, we see not what Elijah did, but what God did. We God working and moving in response to prayer. Prayer is the means of bringing God into what we do. Prayer is the avenue whereby we see God work.

2. R. A. Torrey said, "Prayer is the key that opens wide the inexhaustible storehouse of divine grace and power. There is only one limit to what prayer can do; that is what God can do."

3. Torrey speaking of D.L. Moody described him as a far greater pray-er than preacher. He spoke of how time and time again he was confronted by obstacles that seemed insurmountable, but he always knew the way to surmount and overcome all difficulties. Torrey said, "He knew the way to bring to pass anything that needed to be brought to pass."

3. Thomas Guthrie said, "The direct power of prayer is, in a sense, omnipotent. Prayer moves the hand that moves the world." Jonathan Edwards said, "There is no way that Christians, in a private capacity, can do so much to promote the work of God and advance the kingdom of Christ as by prayer." Charles Trumbull said, "Prayer is releasing the energies of God. For prayer is asking God to do what we cannot do."

4. What were all these men saying? They were saying that there is power in prayer! They are telling us that God can accomplish much through a person that will pray. Elijah prayed and God answered in a great and mighty way. Elijah was a man subject to like passions as we are, yet he reminds us that we can prevail in prayer. LET'S PRAY!