

Prevailing Prayer 2

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

This will be the last study on answered prayer as we've been talking about answered prayer for the past three Sundays. That's as opposed to the kind of prayer that at times is answered and at times isn't answered -- the kind of prayer that many Christians experience throughout their lives and many non-Christians too. Whereas the kind of prayer that God wants his children to experience is prevailing prayer, prayer that is answered continually and repeatedly so that we can actually speak to a man and say, "Rise and walk", and then know that he will rise and walk. We know that the mighty God in heaven will not be let down, or exposed, or disrepute brought to his name because we have prayed a prayer that we were not sure he wanted us to pray.

And so we believe that it is God's will for his children to pray prevailing prayers or answered prayers. We believe that this is what brings glory to God. And you find that mentioned you remember in James 5:16 if you'd like to look at it. James 5:16, "Therefore confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed." And then the second part of the verse, "The prayer of a righteous man has great power in its effects." Or the King James Version says, "The prayer of a righteous man availeth much."

Now here's an example of prevailing prayer (or answered prayer) in James 5:17. "Elijah was a man of like nature with ourselves 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 the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth its fruit."

We've been saying that God wants us to ask for definite objects and not pray like this; "Father somewhere in the world I pray it will rain today." That's because, it probably will. And not, "Father I want you to bless all the missionaries throughout the world." That's because, God probably will. And not, "Father I ask you to bless my family this year." That's because God wants to bless them.

But when you ask for definite objects, the answering of that prayer brings glory to the Father. Now who suggests the object? Usually we look at our situation at college this year and we think, "Well Lord, I need this. I need so much money for this and I certainly need books for that. And this time next year I'll need this kind of a job." Or we're in a certain situation with our families and we try to psychoanalyze all the children and decide what they need. Then we say, "Now, Lord this is what I recommend and I suggest that you do this for them." Now dear ones, that isn't the way to answered prayer.

The key to answered prayer is to let God do the suggesting. Now, this is what you find Elijah doing in that story we're referring to. It's in 1 Kings 18 and you find that after the rain had stopped then Elijah didn't start thinking, "Now, when would it be a good time for it to start raining again?" Or, "Do I think these people have had enough and should I ask God for rain?" No, it was God himself suggested it. 1 Kings 18:1, "After many days the word of the LORD came to Elijah, in the third year, saying, 'Go, show yourself to Ahab; and I will send rain upon the earth.'"

Do you see it wasn't Elijah's thought that it was time for it to rain? It was God who said, "It's time to rain." This is the first key to answered prayer, that you let God do the suggesting. You go to God believing that he knows what is the right answer to your present situation. It's not that

you go to him with all kinds of suggestions and ideas of your own but that you go to him believing that he already knows what to do in that situation.

Now you remember the other reference we looked up, it's in Ezekiel 36:37. There's another indication that Israel was in trouble, God already had the answer all planned and he didn't need suggestions from them. In Ezekiel 36:37 the Israelites were again in one of their terrible national disasters. They were in exile and God knew what he was going to do. And so he knew what he was going to allow the people to ask him about. Ezekiel 36:37, "Thus says the Lord GOD: This also I will let the house of Israel ask me to do for them: to increase their men like a flock."

Now God knew what he wanted to do for the people but he could not do it until they asked him and that's why he says, "I will let the people ask me to do this. I could do it without them asking but then I'd turn the whole world into a great robot that did what I wanted it to do whether it wanted to or not. But I will let them ask me and when they have asked me I can do what I intended to do." Now that is the way to answered prayer dear ones. God already knows what he wants to do in your life in every little difficulty but he cannot do it until you pray it.

God can do nothing against your will. He can do nothing against his own will but he can do nothing without the cooperation of your will. And the first key to answered prayer is believing that God has an answer already for you. And therefore, our task is really to find out what that answer is. Now you know that that's completely different to the way we go to God. We go to God with all the problems of the world on our shoulders and all our possible answers filling our heads. Then we go to God and throw the whole lot out hoping that he'll answer one of them.

Now dear ones, that isn't God's plan. God's plan is that we should go to him and listen. You remember the way it was with Samuel, he came to Eli and he said, "Did you call me?" And Eli said, "No, I didn't call you go back to bed." And then Samuel came back and said, "Listen, I heard you calling me. You called, 'Samuel, Samuel.'" And Eli said, "No, no, that is the Lord calling you. Now go back to bed and when he calls you tell him, 'Here am I and I am listening to you. I am your servant.'"

Now brothers and sisters that needs to be out attitude with God, "Lord God what is your will for this situation? I'm looking to you now what are you going to do about it? Will you let me know?" And that's the first key to answered prayer that you don't pray up your own ideas or your own suggestions. You go to God and say, "Here am I Lord, for your servant heareth. I'm listening. Now Lord you let me know what you want me to pray for you to do in this situation."

Now you remember, last Sunday we also shared that it wasn't just a matter of going to God and looking at him and seeing what he was thinking and listening to him. There was another key to answered prayer. God always answers a situation in order to reveal his own nature. You see, we tend to go to God preoccupied with a human need. Many of us go to God with a sickness and we go saying, "Lord God, the greatest thing in the whole world is that you should heal this sickness." And you can see how miserably self centered that is.

It's like saying, "Lord God we're having a picnic lunch today. We need sunshine whatever the farmers need, we need sunshine." And you see God can't run the universe like that. God always answers prayers in order to show forth his own nature in some way. And so we must always go to God on that basis. You remember, Sodom and Gomorrah and the problem there. God had determined to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah and he told Abraham this. Abraham knew that his nephew Lot was in Sodom

and Gomorrah and would be destroyed with the two cities.

Now Abraham didn't go and say, "Lord, I want you to save my nephew Lot. I want you to save him. I want you therefore not to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah." Do you see that Abraham looked into God's eyes and saw what God's nature really was? Now here's what he really saw and you can look at it yourselves in Hebrews 1:9. This is what Abraham saw was God's true nature. As Abraham knelt before him and said, "Lord, look at this situation what do you want to do about it?" Then God showed him, "This is a vital part of my nature that I must show forth. Hebrews 1:9, "Thou hast loved righteousness and hated lawlessness; therefore God, thy God, has anointed thee with the oil of gladness beyond thy comrades."

Abraham saw that God loves righteousness and hates lawlessness. He loves righteous men and he hates lawless men. Now, do you see the way this affected Abraham's prayers? Look at Genesis 18:23 and 26, It really surprises us the apparent impertinence of Abraham to try and persuade God. But Abraham was going to God with what God had already shown him of his own nature. He knew that God was a God who loved righteous men and hated lawless men. Genesis 18:23, "Then Abraham drew near, and said, 'Lord don't destroy Sodom and Gomorrah, don't destroy Sodom and Gomorrah. Please don't destroy Sodom and Gomorrah. Please don't destroy Sodom and Gomorrah.'" No, He didn't.

"Then Abraham drew near, and said, 'Wilt thou indeed destroy the righteous with the wicked?'" Now do you see that Abraham went to God on the basis of God's own nature? God wants us to take him seriously. There is a time when you can get hold of God in prayer. Now, you do not like to be ignored yourselves. If you do not like going to cowboy movies, then you don't like your friends always telling you about the latest cowboy movie that is on. You don't like them telling you, "Listen there's a good one on TV tonight, will you come?" You feel like yelling out at them, "I hate cowboy movies. Don't ask me to come." And you feel that they're not taking you seriously. You feel they're just ignoring you.

Now do you see loved ones that God is the same? God loves to be taken seriously. He loves to find a man or a woman who really believes that he is the kind of God he says he is. And you can see that Abraham pushed this to the very limit with God. Look at it in Genesis 18:23, "Abraham drew near, and said, 'Wilt thou indeed destroy the righteous with the wicked? Suppose there are fifty righteous within the city; wilt thou then destroy the place and not spare it for the fifty righteous who are in it?'"

Imagine saying this to the Father, "Far be it from thee to do such a thing." You see, it's not you saying, "You shouldn't do that." But it's saying, "I know Lord that this is not the way you deal with your children. I know this is far from you to destroy righteous men with lawless men and to save the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous fare as the wicked! Far be that from thee! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" And Abraham was beginning to see into God's heart and see God would not do this.

And that's what prevailing prayer is. It's seeing through all your silly little ideas for the situation, and seeing into the very heart of God and what he wants to do in that situation. But Abraham kept on, "And the LORD said, 'If I find at Sodom fifty righteous in the city, I will spare the whole place for their sake.'" And you remember how it goes on through verse 32, it's incredible. We would normally be afraid to speak this way to God but God is glad when his children believe in him. Verse 32, "Then he said, 'Oh let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak again but this once. Suppose ten are found there.' He answered, 'For the sake of ten I will not destroy it.'"

And the LORD went his way, when he had finished speaking to Abraham; and Abraham returned to his place.”

Now brothers and sisters that's the key to prevailing prayer, believing that God has an answer and then going to God on the basis of his own nature. Now loved ones, do you see it changes this whole attitude to sickness. We are silly little naïve people when we say, “Oh why did God heal that person and not heal that one?” Do you see that the Father is interested in something more than a sinful world full of healthy people? Sickness itself is an indication to us that things are wrong, that there's something rotten in the whole situation. And so God is certainly not intent on healing every person at this moment. But God's will for us is health and if he can reveal his nature by healing a person then he will do that.

Now loved ones, it's the same with your situations; your jobs, your homes, and your families. We have to start getting out of this position of being a little fly. Think of a little fly sitting on a platform saying, “Turn off the lights. Turn off the lights, they're blinding me.” And I'll say, “Listen fly, there are a whole lot of other people that need the light. You think you should want it out to suit you?”

Now loved ones, do you see God is in the same position? We have to start looking at it from his angle. “Father, what is your intention for this world? What is your intention for my home? What's your intention for my job? What's your intention for me?” And brothers and sisters as we begin to try and find out what God wants to do we'll begin to enter into prevailing prayer.

Now you see a lot of say there are pressing situations where you can't do that. You just have to ask him right away?” No dear ones, let's look at what's a pressing situation which none of us have been in up to the moment. It's in Acts 7:54-60. Some of us never get out of the fox hole type of prayers. Well there is no situation so pressing that you cannot look up to the Father and preoccupy yourself with what he wants to do. Here we see Stephen, and you haven't been stoned to death have you? Okay, so you haven't ever faced as pressing a situation as this.

Acts 7:54-56 --“Now when they heard these things they were enraged, and they ground their teeth against him. But he, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God; and he said, ‘Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing at the right hand of God.’” Loved ones, do you see we're too often in the position, “Lord save me from the stones, save me from the stones. Make their aim bad.”

That isn't the way God wants us to pray. He wants us to pray as Stephen prayed, “Behold I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing at the right hand of God.’ But they cried out with a loud voice and stopped their ears and rushed together upon him. Then they cast him out of the city and stoned him; and the witnesses laid down their garments at the feet of a young man named Saul. And as they were stoning Stephen, he prayed, ‘Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.’ And he knelt down and cried with a loud voice, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them.’ And when he had said this, he fell asleep.

Now that's always the key to prevailing prayer. Looking into the Father's eyes and saying, “Father, I forget these things that I need. Lord, what do you want to do in this situation? Whether it means that I am full or empty, what do you want to do in this situation?” And the key to prevailing prayer is finding out what God intends to do. Then you ask him to do it and he does it.

Now some of you are saying, "Oh but brother, how do you ever find out what is God's will for a situation? How do you ever find it out? How do you know it's God's will and not your own ideas, or your own mind, or the wisdom of your own thinking? How can you be sure it's God's own will?" There's only one way dear ones, you'll see it symbolized there in 1 Kings 19:11-12, "And he said, 'Go forth, and stand upon the mount before the LORD.' And behold, the LORD passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and broke in pieces the rocks before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire; and after the fire a still small voice. And when Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. And behold, there came a voice to him, and said, 'What are you doing here, Elijah?'"

We get into a situation where we don't know what job we should take. And there comes the earthquake of financial needs and it storms our mind and preoccupies our whole thinking. And we go to God with this earthquake of financial needs rocking inside us. We're all preoccupied with our finances, and preoccupied with where to get the next dollar. And when we go before God it is impossible to hear God's voice. You can't for the earthquake of financial need is too strong. That's the only voice you're hearing. And every prayer that you offer will come out of the earthquake of your financial needs. Loved ones, the voice of God is not in the earthquake.

Or, you go before God and you don't know which job to take. The fire of selfish personal ambition is burning inside you and that fire is burning so loudly and strongly that you can't hear God's voice. You're burning up inside and you're saying, "Lord God I want to be successful. Give me a job that will make me successful." Dear ones, do you see that until we die to the earthquake, and the fire, and the strong wind of all our own desires you cannot hear the still small voice of the Father.

How do you know God's will and when you're not listening to your own will? That's it. You know God's voice when you've died to your own voice and when you've stopped listening to all the voices of your own needs -- your own personal and material needs. And then the still smaller voice of God comes through and says, "I want you to have this." And here's the beauty of it, when you go God's way all the other things are added unto you. Believe me. It is true. If you only step back from those pressing needs, and step back from the earthquake, wind, and the fire, then you'll let that still small voice of God's spirit come through.

Now loved ones, some of you have gone through agonies on the boy and girl friendships just because of this, you know it. It's the prayer that Moody says somebody prayed, "Lord, will you give me Rachel as my wife? I'm going to have her whether you give me to her or not."

Now do you see it cannot be that way? There has to come a death to that girl of yours, or that boy of yours. It has to come to the point where you say, "Father I am willing not to be married or to be married as you wish. I am willing for it to be this person or any other person." And then loved ones, the voice of God begins to come through and he just comes through so beautifully that you know it's him. You have no doubt. And you can pray that prayer up to him and know that it's going to be answered.

But brothers and sisters if you were to ask me this morning, "What more than anything else prevents us praying prevailing prayers?" Loved ones, it's our own wishes, our own desires. We're always offering up to God our own desires. We're always in the midst of the earthquake, the wind, and the fire. We're never at that point of neutrality and that's where the Father wants us to be. He wants us in that point of neutrality where we're gentle, we move easily in his hands. We move this way or

that way just as he wishes and then his voice begins to be heard within us.

And so really, the key to prevailing prayer is looking to God and believing that he has an answer. Then it's believing that he is going to show forth his own nature in that answer. Then it's dying to your own desires for the situation so that you can at last hear his voice. After that it's walking in absolute faith that God is answering your prayer. You walk in absolute faith never considering that he might not answer. You walk in absolute faith and confidence that he is answering.

Now brothers and sisters it is possible to walk in that kind of prayer. Believe me. I walked in that other stuff and it's miserable. You're just walking like the non-Christian, offering up 10 prayers and if he answers one, then we say God answers prayer. Loved ones, God doesn't want us to play games like that. He wants us to take him seriously and to begin to get from him what he wants for a situation.

Now brothers and sisters I'd ask you this morning, would you do that? Would you choose some situation that you're in, some need that you have or somebody else has this morning, and would you begin to approach God in that spirit? The first thing would be to say, "Father, what is your plan for the situation? What do you want?" And maybe you begin to come up against the view that you don't really want what he wants. Do you see that that's where you have to wrestle like Jacob? You have to wrestle with that and allow the Holy Spirit to mold you and melt you until you want what God wants. Only then will you begin to enter into this prevailing prayer.

Do you see we can pray for rain and it'll rain? We can pray that the rain will stop and it will stop. God is still doing that kind of thing. And brothers and sisters, I would share with those of you who are interested in going out with Christian Corps to transform this world for Jesus, going out among those 2.5 billion who do not know him, do you see we'll need those kinds of prayers to do that? We'll need a God who can stop rain, and can stop riots. You can enter into this kind of prayer. It is God's will for you.

So I pray that he'll help you this coming week because I think it's ridiculous for us to be wandering around as milk and water Christians; sometimes he answers sometimes he doesn't. Sometimes he says yes, sometimes he says no. No, the Father always answers the prayer or explains what he wants you to pray for. He doesn't leave you in ignorance and in uncertainty. I pray that you'll experience some of it this week. Let us pray.

Father we know that it is bringing you no glory for us to be sending up these continual lists of requests and counting it better than average if you answer two out of three. Father we know this is not the way you want us to deal with you. Lord God, we commit ourselves today to beginning to pray prevailing prayers, to begin looking to you Father and believing you have an answer for the situation. And then looking to you again and trusting you to show us what part of your nature you want to reveal so that we may approach you on the basis of that nature.

Then Lord, we trust you to give us the wisdom and the insight to die to all our own wishes for each situation so that we can hear your still small voice bringing your will to us and dwell in that point of neutrality. Then Father, will you give us grace to begin to walk in absolute faith that the prayer will be answered knowing that it was a prayer that came from you at the very beginning.

So Lord, we commit ourselves to you for a good week lived in your world subduing the world in your way by the power of the Holy Spirit through prayers that prevail and that are recognized and heard

by you. We commit ourselves to you for this purpose. In Jesus' name amen.