

Prevailing Prayer 1

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

Prevailing prayer is prayer that is answered. It is mentioned very clearly in James, if you'd like to look at it now. James 5:16b, "The prayer of a righteous man has great power in its effects." In the King James Version it says, "The prayer of a righteous man availeth much." And that is prayer that is answered. And there's an example of it you see in the next verse, "Elijah was a man of like nature with ourselves and he prayer 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."

Now that is the kind of prayer that is called prevailing prayer and obviously it is the kind of prayer that God wants his children to use, and is the kind of prayer God wants us to progress in our lives. And part of the reason we have such problems in our lives is we're trying to do things that can only be done supernaturally by prayer. We're trying to do them so often by psychology or even by just our jobs, or by politics. And of course it is God's will that he should do these things supernaturally in answer to prevailing prayer. And that's why goodness or the Spirit of Jesus seems to be making little progress in the world compared with the size of the world because so few of us are actually involved in prevailing prayer which is really God's will for us.

You remember, that he stated that very plainly in 1 John 5:14-15 where God points out that this is the kind of prayer that he wants us to have. 1 John 5:14-15, "And this is the confidence which we have in him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us. And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have obtained the requests made of him." And obviously that's the kind of prayer that God wants us to experience. It's totally different from the kind of prayer most of us experience. Most of us have a piecemeal experience of answered prayers. Sometimes he answers, sometimes he doesn't.

We try to rationalize it by saying, "Well, sometimes God answers yes, sometimes he answers no, sometimes he answers wait. I guess this is one of the times he says wait." And we just wait. And eventually brother and sisters that though we keep trying to wait in faith, at last our prayers to deteriorate. They deteriorate until we begin praying that old prayer, "Lord, do this if it's your will." And we keep on adding that at the end of our prayers. Now that has a real difficulty in it if you pray like that because you remember, what God said in James 1:6 about prayer. It's a statement that utterly contradicts that whole attitude that we have when we say, "If it's your will."

James 1:6-7, "But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. For that person must not suppose that a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways, will receive anything from the Lord." Now brothers and sisters it's a little difficult at times to pray, "Lord will you do this in my dormitory if it's your will." It's a little difficult to pray that with firmness and with confidence. And you know that most of our prayers deteriorate into this kind of prayer. We ask doubting and we're like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. We ask and then he doesn't seem to answer so we're not really sure whether it's God's will or not. So we try it one more night and nothing happens so we sort of back off from it. Then we see the person again and we get all inspired and we start praying again and then God doesn't seem to answer so we're not sure whether it's his will or not. And we keep tossing back like a wave of the sea.

Now brothers and sisters you can't pray if it is your will at the end of every prayer and yet pray in absolute faith and confidence. When Jesus prayed that prayer he knew what the two possibilities were and he said, "Listen Lord, if this is your will I'm going ahead with it." It was that kind of positive thing, "Nevertheless, if this is your will then your will be done." Jesus already saw in his mind what God's will was and he was saying, "If this is your will let it be done." But do you see so often we have brought this into our prayers and we have said, "Well, I'll throw the prayer up to God let him do what he can with it. And if it's his will he'll answer it, if it isn't his will he won't answer it."

You can see that by that kind of prayer life we come into a very uncertain attitude to God. And prayer eventually becomes a kind of superstition that we throw in for good measure when we're in a difficult spot. So many of us come to this place we say, "Oh yes, of course I prayed about it. I've done lots of other things but of course I prayed about it. As a good Christian I ought to pray about it and I always pray about everything." And I throw that in as well.

Or we say, "Oh, there's nothing left to do but pray. I've tried everything else but there's nothing I can do now but pray." Now brothers and sisters that is an attitude to prayer that brings pain to the Father's heart and brings defeat in our own lives. It is God's will that we should pray with assurance and confidence. It is God's will that we should pray prevailing prayers. We should go before God and ask for things definitely and believe in him to bring them about.

Now you may say, "Well, how do I do that? How do I approach God then in a certain situation?" Well, there are several things to remember. I think maybe the first key is this, when you go to God about a situation remember that he has already a plan of deliverance mapped out. There is no situation into which you or I have come that God does not understand fully and out of which he has not already planned a way of deliverance. There is nothing brothers and sisters that you come into that God does not fully understand and out of which he has already planned a way of deliverance.

Calvary didn't come to the Father as a shock and surprise. God foresaw Calvary and knew what he was going to transform Calvary into. Now, it's the same with our situation. You come into a situation, you failed all the exams and you don't know where to go next. Or, you've been going with this girl for a while and you really don't know whether that is the one or not. Or, you don't know whether to take this job or not. Or, you don't know whether to go into this new dormitory or not. The first thing you need to remember when you go before the Father is, "Father you know all about this. You've already made out a plan for me."

A lot of us have the feeling that we're God's eyes. We see the situation, we analyze it and then we go to him and we make our recommendations to him. Now, that's not it loved ones. God doesn't need your eyes. He can see directly. He can see the situation; he already has a plan made out for you. He has it made, he has it all organized and he's just waiting for you to discover it and to ask him to bring it about. But a lot of us you see go to him and we go to him with recommendations and suggestions. God doesn't want that. He wants us to come before him saying, "Father, you know this whole situation and I know that you have an answer for it."

Now loved ones, you can see the reason for saying that in Ezekiel 36:37. You remember we looked at it briefly last Sunday. You remember Israel was devastated. It was the time of one of the enslavements of Israel by her enemies and then in Ezekiel 36:37 it says, "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, it didn't require Ezekiel to go up to God and say, "Lord, would you think of increasing your men like a flock?" He didn't have to say it; God had the plan already made. God knew what he was going to do but he said there, "I will let the house of Israel ask me to do this for them."

Now that's a rule and a principle from the Father. He sees what to do to redeem the whole world but before he can take any action in redeeming the whole world he has to put it into one of our hearts or wills to ask him to do it. Otherwise you see it just becomes a mighty God using us as robots. He could fill China with missionaries at this moment; he has no difficulty in doing that. He could make missionaries and send them to China, but do you see God will not overrule the free will of mankind because eventually he wants free willing spirits to love him and worship him. And so he will do nothing to redeem the world until you or I get the message and ask him to do it.

And so when we go to God we should go saying, "Father I know you have a will for this situation, I know you have a way out of it. Now Father, I'm just going to wait before you and trust you to reveal it to me so that you can let me ask you to do this for me." But do you see that's the spirit he wants. You don't go to the Father all fretfully preoccupied with the situation, "Lord what am I going to do? What am I going to do? Where will I live this coming year? Where will I live? Who will I marry? What job will I get? Where will I get the money for this situation? How will I manipulate the finances?"

Loved ones, that's not a spirit of faith. A spirit of faith is coming before the Father on the basis of this kind of promise and saying, "Father I can see right throughout history you've always had an answer for every situation men have gotten themselves into. Now Father here I am. I have \$75 in the bank account and you know what you're going to do. Now Father, will you reveal to me what you want me to ask you for?" But brothers and sisters it's always that.

Dear ones, those of us involved in teaching and involved in getting teaching jobs it's no way to go before the Father and say, "Lord, you know I have to have a job. You know I need the money. You know I'm in trouble financially. You know I have bills to pay. You know I have that loan to payoff." Loved ones, do you see that's just getting deeper and deeper into Satan's circumstances and it's not a spirit of faith.

You go before the Father and say, "Father you put me on this earth. You're my Father, you know about this whole situation and you have a plan for it. Now Lord I'm waiting before you and I'm going to worship and adore you until you reveal to me what you want me to ask you to do." And that's the spirit you see. You'll see it in Exodus 14:10. You'll need to really try and put yourself in the place of the Israelites because to them this was an impossible situation. Exodus 14:10, "When Pharaoh drew near, the people of Israel lifted up their eyes, and behold, the Egyptians were marching after them; and they were in great fear. And the people of Israel cried out to the LORD."

Now we see what their attitude was and that's often our situation. We look at Pharaoh coming after us and we think, "Well, nobody knows this but us. We better inform somebody. We better call them up and let them know." Well it isn't necessary to do it. If you look at Verse 15-18, "The LORD said to Moses, 'Why do you cry to me? Tell the people of Israel to go forward. Lift up your rod, and stretch out your hand over the sea and divide it, that the people of Israel may go on dry ground through the sea. And I will harden the hearts of the Egyptians so that they shall go in after them, and I will get glory over Pharaoh and all his hosts, his chariots, and his horsemen. And the Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD, when I have gotten glory over Pharaoh, his chariots, and

his horsemen.” And God had the whole thing arranged.

Now brothers and sisters if God had all that arranged for the Israelites for a huge mass of people with the greatest enemy in the world coming after them, surely he has plans for your job. Surely he has some place in his mind to make plans for your job, or your marriage, or your finances. Now do you see we go to God in a spirit of faith believing that he already has an answer? That’s the first key to prevailing prayer. We go saying, “Father, I know you have an answer. I’m not going to get disturbed by looking at the circumstances. I’m going to look to you, put my faith in your faithfulness and believe that you’ve already an answer for me. Now will you let me know what that answer is so that I can ask you to do it?”

Now that’s the first key. Now some of us say, “Well, do you just kneel before God and adore him and praise him and then an answer comes?” Well, really you do but there are some indications as to what God will do in a situation and how he will answer. God will always answer a situation in order to reveal more of his character to you or to the other people involved. God will always answer our situations and our problems in order to reveal more of his nature to us and to the world.

Now you can see that in that passage in Exodus that we just read. You can see that was at the back of God’s answer in Exodus 14:18 when God said, “And the Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD, when I have gotten glory over Pharaoh, his chariots, and his horsemen.” Why did God answer? Was it to save the Israelites? No, it was to reveal to the Egyptians that he was God; not their queens, not their ancestors, not the spirit that moved the bush at the end of the road but that he was God. He was the Creator of the universe. Now God will always answer our prayers in order to show forth a different part of his nature to us or to others. Do you see that’s why at times God heals and at times he doesn’t heal. At times he heals this moment, at times he heals three weeks later because it’s all bound up not in providing everybody in the world with perfect health but with God’s primary purpose for himself and for his creation to make himself more known to the people that he has made. And God will always answer our prayers in relationship to that.

You can see how small minded we get. We get all preoccupied with this little financial difficulty. We get all preoccupied with this little relationship difficulty, and God himself has a far greater purpose for that situation than just fixing up the relationship. God will always answer our prayers in relationship to the nature and the part of his nature that he wants to reveal to others.

Now you can see it if you follow through any of the records of his answer to prayers. You can see it there in 1 Kings 18 that we read earlier in the service. And you remember what the result, the final result of the event was. 1 Kings 18:36-37, “And at the time of the offering of the oblation, Elijah the prophet came near and said, ‘O LORD, God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, let it be known this day that thou art God in Israel, and that I am thy servant.’” “Let it be known this day that thou art God in Israel, and that I am thy servant, and that I have done all these things at thy word. Answer me, O LORD, answer me, that I may be seen to be a great prophet, that I may be seen to be a great magician, that these people may be turned back from wanting to kill me, that my finances may be increased.” No. “Answer me, O LORD, answer me, that this people may know that thou, O LORD, art GOD, and that thou has turned their hearts back.”

Now brothers and sisters, God is preoccupied with that and part of the problem in our own lives is that we aren’t preoccupied with that. So often we haven’t come to the point where we are preoccupied with God and with him showing his nature to mankind. So often we’re preoccupied with other things. But those are two keys dear ones. Next Sunday I’ll try to deal with the two last keys

to prevailing prayer but those are the first two keys.

First of all see that God has an answer. Don't go to him with all the worries. Some of us go to him and you'd think we were instructing God how to do it. We tell him in detail all the situation and then we tell him exactly what he should do. Dear ones, go before the Father in faith, "Father you know the situation." I'd love to know what your situations are but I can guess that some of you men and woman are concerned about where you're going to live this year. You are concerned about whether you're going to live in a Christian house, or in a room, or a dorm, or what you're going to do. And some of you men must be concerned at this point in the economy with jobs and what you're going to do for a job.

Now, go before the Father and say, "Father, I know that you have an answer to this." Brothers if you're sitting there and you're saying, "But, I'm not sure," then read the bits of the Bible that tells you that's so. Allow him to build up your faith by hearing the word of God until you come to an inner assurance, "Yes Father, I know you have an answer to this."

That's the fight of faith loved ones. We are fighting against Satan's temptation to be preoccupied with the problem and instead looking to the Father who is the answer to every problem. Not looking at your own scarcity and your own lack, but looking at God's fullness and God's complete supply. It is not a matter of bringing Jesus down to earth because you cannot do that. You lift yourself and allow the Holy Spirit to lift you up from the midst of your difficulties into the full supply of God. And loved ones, when you dwell there at his right hand there is no shortage of money, or health, or jobs, or happiness, or peace. Everything is there. And that's the fight of faith seeing that God is the answer.

The second step is, "Father, I want your character to be revealed in this." And that means dying which I'll talk a little about next Sunday. That means dying to your own consciousness of your own intense need. That means saying, "Father, I don't care what happens to me but I want your character and your nature to be revealed in this." Then brothers and sisters, God is in a position to reveal to you what he is going to do so that you can ask him to do it and he does it. And that's it -- really.

The answer comes just like that as soon as you get his will. Loved ones, I know it in my own life and others have known it down through the years. When you get God's will for a situation you ask it, and it's done. That's it. The fight of faith is fighting against the tendency to be preoccupied with the problem and fighting against the tendency to have your need answered above everything else and instead rising into God's complete supply and wanting his nature to be revealed.

Now brothers and sisters I'll try to share more next Sunday morning about prevailing prayer. But would you begin to move that way? Would you? Would you stop getting down into the midst of the problems? Would you start looking at God and think, "Maybe if his thoughts are bigger than your thoughts, then just maybe he has had time to think about your problem already?" And it is probable that he has an answer for them. Let us pray.

