

Prayer and the Sovereignty of God

James 5:17,18

- 17 Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain: and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months.
- 18 And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit. KJV

Introduction:

There are many things said about prayer in the Word of God, many instances of prayer, many exhortations concerning prayer, and many instances in which the prayers of God's people were heard and answered in remarkable ways.

There is no question in my mind but that we stand, as a country, where Israel often stood during their years as a nation, under the oppression of evil, subject to almost certain and overwhelming judgment through God allowing their enemies to completely devastate them.

The reactions of those who call themselves 'God's People' are as varied now as they were then. Some are in complete despair, certain that God is done with us, that the judgment of complete destruction is inevitable. Others are following with wide-eyed ignorance the proclamations of the false prophets who are declaring, "peace, peace" when it is obvious that no peace is possible if things continue as they are. Then, there are a few souls who look at the situation like Gideon did at the massive Midianite army and his little band of 300 with confidence that the Lord would deliver the enemy into his hands. They know absolutely that the enemy is massive and powerful, that their own forces are weak and few, but they also know that they serve a mighty God Who can deliver the enemy into their hands by His Power. So, they are praying, seeking His Face, seeking to put aside out of their own selves all hindrances which grieve the Holy Spirit and withhold His working among them.

They know that God is Sovereign, that the ultimate disposition of all things is in His hand, and, at times, they struggle with whether they should be praying, that maybe they are praying something contrary to His Sovereign Will and displeasing Him by doing so. My desire is to attempt to dispel those fears for you by the encouragements and directions of the Word of God.

I. First of all, we know that the Great Work of Christ has provided us with the opportunity of prayer.

1 John 2:1-2

- 1 My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous:
- 2 And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world. KJV

The fact that Jesus Christ died and rose again, ascended back to heaven, and was given the seat of authority on the Right Hand of the Father, all of that grants the believe access to the ear of

God in a way that is so profound we often shrink back from it unable to believe that such a thing is even possible.

The Living God? Listen to me? Kindly disposed toward my prayers? Willing to listen? Yet all of these things are exactly and precisely implied in the words, “we have an advocate with the Father.”

Yet this is not the full extent of the picture. The Work of Christ also has provided us with the Work of the Holy Spirit Who has been given, as Jesus said, to “guide us into all righteousness.” He, too, is involved in the issue of prayer.

Rom 8:26-27

26 Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.

27 And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God. KJV

And, we are taught in the Word that the Father Himself is not grieved with us but has accepted us in the Person of His Son. The Entire Trinity is available to the praying saint because of what Jesus Christ accomplished on the Cross. *The opportunity of prayer is provided to us.*

II. But we do not have merely the opportunity of prayer, we have also the Command to Pray.

Matt 6:6

6 But thou, *when thou prayest*, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly. KJV

Matt 26:41

41 *Watch and pray*, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak. KJV

Luke 18:1

1 And he spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint; KJV (unjust judge)

Eph 6:18

18 Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints; KJV (whole armor of God)

Many more examples I could give but you know that prayer is urged upon the saints throughout scripture. There is no question but it is the revealed will of God that His people should always

pray, never ceasing, seeking His Face for their great spiritual needs, especially in times of great distress.

He urged, for example, those who would be alive during the siege of Jerusalem to pray that their time of escape would not be in the winter.

God's people are commanded to pray.

III. The scriptures encourage us to pray by granting many wonderful examples of praying people.

You will remember Seth, the third son of Adam, who was given to Eve as the replacement for Able whom Cain had murdered. Moses records that in his days and those of his son Enos, "men began to call upon the name of the LORD." It was through their prayers, no doubt, that a tiny remnant of humanity, eight souls to be exact, was saved through the flood as God held open the invitation of salvation to any who would hear the preaching of Noah.

Abraham was a great man of faith and also a man of prayer through whom God not only brought the physical nation of Israel into the world but also that great Spiritual Nation which He redeemed by the blood of His Own Son, that mighty multitude without number that John saw being ushered into the New Heaven and the New Earth. God's Grace is the activating agent for sure in the whole thing but Abraham's faith and prayers are part of the means by which He is bringing it all to pass.

Moses, as we will see in a few minutes, strove mightily with God in prayer and prevailed as he led Israel from Egypt to Canaan.

David was a man mighty in prayer, many of his prayers preserved for us in the Psalms. He was imperfect, for sure, as all men are but His prayers have encouraged, inspired, blessed, and guided by example believers in ever century since he lived. He was granted insight into the sufferings of the Savior as he wrote the 22nd Psalm from which Jesus quoted as He hung on the cross.

As we saw in the opening text, Elijah prayed and shut off the waters of heaven, prayed again and the rains returned, prayed on Mt. Carmel and God answered by fire.

Many others example we might mention of the mighty examples given to us in the Word concerning prayer.

IV. But the Scriptures also teach us that God is Sovereign.

Eph 1:11 teaches us that He, "works all things according to the counsel of His Own Will." And Isa 46:10 tells that He declares, "the end from the beginning." It is a cardinal doctrine to us that God is the Complete and Total Lord over all things in all times from eternity past to eternity to future.

This sometimes brings Sovereign Grace folk to a series of dilemmas:

- What is the Will of God in this matter?
- If I pray according to what I see is the need, am I praying against the Sovereign Will of God?
- Can prayer really change things at all, or am I just beating my head against a wall?
- Can my prayers actually change anything since God has already determined how they are going to be?

Before I proceed any further let me tell you that all of us who believe in God's Sovereignty struggle with these and other questions. You are not alone in your questions and they do not make you less spiritual. It is the answers to those questions that are critical, however. ***What happens to us sometimes, if we are not careful, is that we undertake to figure out the Secret Will of God and then pray accordingly.***

In fact there are some who think they have already figured out the Will of God concerning some things. Some are so certain that we are in an uncoverable state in our world today that they will not gather with other saints to pray for an Awakening. The reality is that the Secret Will of God is just that, Secret! No one knows what it is. And, since I do not and cannot know it, I cannot interact with it, I cannot plan my praying based on it. I can only pray what I know.

Another reality is the Our God is Omnipotent. He can do anything! Without straining in the slightest He has the ability to send His Holy Spirit to move on our world and change hearts from the smallest to the (so-called) greatest among us. He has, in fact, moved in mighty ways in the past, which should give us hope that He might do it again.

V. In addition to His Secret Will, God also has a Revealed Will, that which He has given us in His Word.

This is what is to inform our praying, for example, "men ought always to pray and not to faint."

He has, "commanded all men, everywhere, to repent." Acts 17:30.

He has given us the Model Pray with a number of issues to interact with every day.

That we might be enabled to "Hallow" His Name.

We are to desire His Kingdom to come and His Will to be done on earth as it is in heaven.

I ask you, is that not a longing for Awakening and Revival?

We are to confess our helplessness and need of Him perpetually ("give us this day...")

We are to seek our own revival in putting away, repenting of, confessing, and asking forgiveness of our sins.

We are to manifest Christlikeness in forgiving those have sinned against us.

" " petition for leadership from Him (paths of righteousness - asking for what we desire by asking not to have what we fear)

" " seek victory over the forces of darkness,

Confessing our allegiance to and desire for His Glory perpetually.

I would suggest to you that any person who interacts fully and faithfully with the Model Prayer

is himself/herself in a state of Spiritual Revival asking that God pour it out generally upon the world.

He has encouraged us to pray for the sick, expecting their healing.

James 5:13-16

13 Is any among you afflicted? let him pray. Is any merry? let him sing psalms.

14 Is any sick among you? 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:

15 And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him.

16 Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much. KJV

Now, I don't know how you interact with these verses in particular but I do encourage you to notice the last statement, *"the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much."*

We are called upon to do far more than merely 'say prayers.' We are called, encouraged, even commanded to pray fervently, to give ourselves to prayer, to agonize in prayer, to give determined energy to prayer.

In all reality it is surprising that God answers any of our prayers at all given the level of interest and dedication that most Christians have in the subject of prayer.

VI. Then, there is something else to consider. As difficult as it may seem to fit it with our theology, God sometimes gives us His Apparent Will, so that we might 'wrestle' with Him over it.

Who was it that Jacob wrestled with by the brook Jabbok in Gen 32:24? Was it not the Lord Himself, possible even a pre-incarnation revelation of the Lord Jesus Christ? There are many who would agree with that. And, what did that 'man' tell him?

Gen 32:26 And he said, Let me go, for the day breaketh...

What was Jacob's response?

Gen 32:26 ...And he said, I will not let thee go, except thou bless me.

Now, I ask you, what was the "Will of God" here? The Revealed Will was for Jacob to let him go, but that was not the actual Will was it? It was the Secret Will of God for Jacob to refuse to let him go and continue wrestling until he received a blessing.

This is not a unique situation either. Remember Moses after the Golden Calf incident?

Ex 32:7-14

7 And the LORD said unto Moses, Go, get thee down; for thy people, which thou

- broughtest out of the land of Egypt, have corrupted themselves:
- 8 They have turned aside quickly out of the way which I commanded them: they have made them a molten calf, and have worshipped it, and have sacrificed thereunto, and said, These be thy gods, O Israel, which have brought thee up out of the land of Egypt.
- 9 And the LORD said unto Moses, I have seen this people, and, behold, it is a stiffnecked people:
- 10 **Now therefore let me alone, that my wrath may wax hot against them, and that I may consume them: and I will make of thee a great nation.**
- 11 And Moses besought the LORD his God, and said, LORD, why doth thy wrath wax hot against thy people, which thou hast brought forth out of the land of Egypt with great power, and with a mighty hand?
- 12 Wherefore should the Egyptians speak, and say, For mischief did he bring them out, to slay them in the mountains, and to consume them from the face of the earth? Turn from thy fierce wrath, and repent of this evil against thy people.
- 13 Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, thy servants, to whom thou swarest by thine own self, and saidst unto them, I will multiply your seed as the stars of heaven, and all this land that I have spoken of will I give unto your seed, and they shall inherit it for ever.
- 14 And the LORD repented of the evil which he thought to do unto his people. KJV

What was the Revealed Will of God here? Was it not that Moses stand aside so that God might destroy Israel and begin again with him? What was the Actual Will of God? Was it not that Moses intercede for them that God might spare them?

And, then, another time.

Ex 33:1-3

- 1 And the LORD said unto Moses, Depart, and go up hence, thou and the people which thou hast brought up out of the land of Egypt, unto the land which I swear unto Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, saying, Unto thy seed will I give it:
- 2 And I will send an angel before thee; and I will drive out the Canaanite, the Amorite, and the Hittite, and the Perizzite, the Hivite, and the Jebusite:
- 3 Unto a land flowing with milk and honey: for ***I will not go up in the midst of thee; for thou art a stiffnecked people: lest I consume thee in the way.*** KJV

What is the Revealed Will of God here? “I will not go up in the midst of thee.” And, how did Moses handle that?

Ex 33:12-15

- 12 And Moses said unto the LORD, See, thou sayest unto me, Bring up this people: and thou hast not let me know whom thou wilt send with me. Yet thou hast said, I know thee by name, and thou hast also found grace in my sight.
- 13 Now therefore, I pray thee, if I have found grace in thy sight, shew me now thy

way, that I may know thee, that I may find grace in thy sight: and consider that this nation is thy people.

14 And he said, **My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest.**(2)

15 And he said unto him, **If thy presence go not with me, carry us not up hence.**
(1)

Paul agonized over the lost condition of His nation, “My heart’s desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they might be saved.” And, while many of them were converted, the majority were not. Was it wrong for him to pray thus? I am sure that it was not.

Sometimes what seems “Apparent” as the “Will of God” is not actually His Will.

God’s people should be encouraged to be bold with Him when presenting matters before Him that are consistent with His Revealed Will and His Promises in His Word.

The book of Hebrews tells us this plainly.

Heb 4:14-16

14 Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession.

15 For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.

16 Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need. KJV

My exhortation to you is to pray, pray boldly, pray with energy, pray with passion, entreat the Lord for our lost ones, for our struggling churches and their pastors, for our communities filled with lost folk, and, yes, for an Awakening in Our Time.

Who knows what the Actual Will of God is concerning these matters?