

Getting the Nod:

Video Clip: **Prayer**

Do you believe what you just saw? Do you believe that prayer is powerful? Do you believe that God still sets people free from addictions? Do you believe that God heals... and God fixes broken hearts? Or are you like the father in Mark 9:23-24 who battled believing that Jesus could cast the demon out of his son...

Jesus said... NLT | Mk 9:23-24 "What do you mean, 'If I can?'" Jesus asked. "Anything is possible if a person believes." 24 The father instantly cried out, "I do believe, but help me overcome my unbelief!"

This morning I want to tell the church and all who are listening... Prayer is supposed to be powerful... but believing is the key to the power! At the end of this service, I will be inviting all of you to join me in a new season of prevailing and powerful prayer; asking God to overhaul your faith and to send us miracles from His throne.

Charles Spurgeon said of prayer: The condition of the church may be very accurately gauged by (how she prays). Prayer is the grace-ometer, and from it we (will) judge the amount of divine working that happens among the people. ***If God is to be near a church, it must pray. And if He is not there, one of the first tokens of His absence will be a slothfulness in prayer.*** (Tom Carter, comp., "Spurgeon at His Best" (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1988), p. 155; selections from the 1873 edition of the "Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit, p. 218.)

Transition: Have you heard the story...

Connecting Us:

Illustrative Joke about the Three-Legged Chickens: There's a story about a man who was driving along a country road when he saw a 3-legged chicken. He was so amazed that he followed it and noticed the chicken was running at 30 mph. "That's a fast chicken," he thought, "I wonder just how fast it can run." He sped up and so did the chicken! Soon they were cruising at 45 mph! The man sped up and the chicken zoomed past him at 60 mph! Suddenly, the chicken turned off the road and ran down a long driveway. The man followed the chicken to the house and saw a man in the yard with dozens of 3-legged chickens.

He called out to the farmer, "How'd you get all these 3-legged chickens?" The farmer said, "I breed them; my wife, son and I love eating chicken legs. Since a chicken only has two legs, I started breeding this 3-legged variety so we could all eat our favorite piece." The driver shouted, "That's amazing! How do they taste?" The farmer replied, **"We don't know, we've never been able to catch them!"**

When it comes to miracles and healing... lot of us are like that amused driver who spotted the 3-legged chicken. We're amazed by healings that occur in Bible stories. We cry out, WOW! We like the idea of God healing our bruised, sick bodies, and we've prayed about it, read stories about it, heard others tell stories about it, but just like the farmer, we've never tasted the joy of divine healing.

But the Bible is full of recorded miracles and divine interventions. Beginning with Abraham, all the other Old Testament characters saw the miracles of God.

- Joseph went from prison to the one in charge... a miracle.
- From bondage in Egypt to a parted Red Sea.
- In the New Testament, Jesus was a miracle worker.
- Pentecost and the Holy Spirit.
- In the early church and centuries since... Miracles.

Transition: Let's be honest, we yearn for the supernatural! We don't have all the answers. **We don't know why some who we pray for are touch by miracles... and some aren't.** Yet, our Bibles encourage us to believe by faith... that God can answer. It's called prevailing prayer. **What do you say we give ourselves to the practice of powerful praying?** Look at James 5...

God's Take on Prevailing Prayer:

NKJV | James 5:13-18 Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing psalms. 14 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. 15 And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. 16 Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. **The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.** 17 Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain; and it did not rain on the land for three years and six months. 18 And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth produced its fruit. 19 Brethren, if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back, 20 let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins.

The Five Visible Priorities of the Early Church:

1. It was a singing church.

- **The Church has always been a singing church.** They were always ready to burst into song!
 - James 5:13 - *Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing psalms.*
 - The Psalms are songs!
 - In **1 Corinthians 14**, Paul describes singing in their church meetings as an integral part.
 - In **Romans 15:9**, Paul reminds the Gentiles of joyous singing from Psalm 18:49.
 - It is characteristic of the Christians that they speak to each other in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in their hearts to the Lord (**Ephesians 5:19**)
 - **The Bottom Line:** *There was a joy in the hearts of the Christians* which burst from their lips in songs of praise for the mercy and the grace of God.
- **When Pliny, governor of Bithynia, wrote to Trajan**, the Roman emperor, in AD 111 to tell him of this new sect of Christians, he said that his information was that 'they are in the habit of meeting on a certain fixed day before it is light, when they sing in alternate verses a hymn to Christ as God'.
- **Application:** The early church was a happy bunch. Breaking out in song at the drop of hat; encouraging each other with hymns and songs; worship was a 24-hour concert in the heart. (**Sing... Solid Rock / How Great Thou Art / Reckless Love / My Chains are Gone**).

2. It was a healing church.

- James 5:14 – 16: *14 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. 15 And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed*

sins, he will be forgiven. 16 Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed.

- **The Church has always cared for the sick;** and the gift of healing has always resided in the Church. The social gospel is not something added on to Christianity; it is the very essence of the Christian faith and life. (Barclay)
- NLT | Ps 103:2 **Let all that I am praise the LORD; may I never forget the good things he does for me. 3 He forgives all my sins and heals all my diseases.**
- NKJV | Is 53:5 **But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, And by His stripes we are healed.**
- NLT | Mt 4:23 **Jesus traveled throughout the region of Galilee, teaching in the synagogues and announcing the Good News about the Kingdom. And he healed every kind of disease and illness.**
- **The Bottom Line: Healing has always been a practice of the church...**
 - **Justin Martyr** writes in the second century that countless people possessed by demons were healed by the Christians when all other exorcists had been unable to cure them and drugs had had no effect.
 - **Irenaeus**, writing late in the second century, tells us that the sick were still healed by having hands laid on them.
 - **Tertullian**, writing mid-way through the third century, says that no less a person than the Roman emperor, Alexander Severus, was healed by anointing at the hands of a Christian called Torpacion and that in his gratitude he kept Torpacion as a guest in his palace until the day of his death.
- **Application: We're going to have a healing service next Sunday in both services.** We will follow the instruction of scripture and anoint with oil... believing in God's power and will for the ceremony. Some may not believe. Many may. Our last Healing Service healed Monica Jones and others were touched. He may or may not heal everyone... our job is not to demand healing... but to pray for healing.

3. It was a praying church.

- **Prayer is the greatest gift God has given His Church to practice.** There are no limits that can be set to the power of prayer!
- **But, one barrier stands in the way of that power... Confession!!!**
- **Confession in the original language** carries with it not only to confess... to profess... and to acknowledge openly and joyfully.
- **There are two barriers to powerful praying:**
 - The barrier between us and God ... which is to come clean with who we really are!
 - The barrier between us and other people.
- **This was, in fact, the custom of the Moravian Church, and John Wesley** took it over for his earliest Methodist classes. They used to meet two or three times a week 'to confess their faults to one another and to pray for one another that they might be healed'.
- James 5:16-18: **16 Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.**
- **The Bottom Line:** The power of prayer is so often missed because of an unwillingness to confess our sins to God... and an unwillingness to make things right.
- **This is clearly a principle which must be used wisely.** It is quite true that there may be cases where confession of sin to each other may do infinitely more harm than good; but, where a barrier has been erected because of some wrong which has been done, people must put themselves right both with God and with one another.
- **Application:** Is there anyone here that want to experience powerful praying that results in miracles? Then let's try this: **Stand up. Raise your hands with palms up. Repeat after me:**
- **(Place the words of this prayer on the sermon slides...)** God, I confess my sins and weaknesses to you and confess that I am not enough to be an overcomer. I am desperate for

you to take over my life, so I pour out of my hands myself... into your hands... and I also confess that I have wronged others. If it is possible... help me to make those things right... and if I cannot... let me live starting this day with your wisdom to make me a righteous person and friend. Let me see your power as the early church did. Amen

4. It was a passionate church.

- **The early church was characterized by passion and zeal!**
- To be **effective and fervent** meant to “put forth power”; “to show one’s self OPERATIVE. In other words, to confidently push forward with belief... to be passionate about something.
- James 5:16: **The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.**
- **The Bottom Line:** The early church was fired up about Jesus. They believed in miracles and answered prayers! They were never skeptical of God’s abilities. They loved the Gospel Story!
- **Application:** Let’s also try something that will help us. Close your eyes and think of the most important human being or people in your life. You love them so much that you would do everything in your power to protect them... even die for them. They are your most prized treasure or treasures. Do you see them? Do you thank God for them?
- **Now, replace your picture with the picture of Jesus on the cross. Add the picture of an empty tomb. Now envision Him... praying for you.**
- **Is that picture as important as your treasured ones? If not, there will be no power in your prayers. Without passion... we become dry bones.**

5. It was a restoring church.

- **Even in the early church, people backslid. And the church sought the wanderer to bring them home.** James 5:19-20: **Brethren, if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back, 20 let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins.**
- In this passage, there is set down the great differentiating characteristic of Christian truth. It is something from which people can wander. It is not only intellectual, philosophical and abstract; it is always a moral truth.
- **The Bottom Line:** Only the love of truth will restore the wanderer from truth. Our love for the truth will help restore backsliding believers.
- **Application:** I have a college friend that was in my class at OCU. He was strong in Greek... a discipler by trade. A great man with a bright future... until he started jogging with a young lady in his church. It progressed into an affair. Devastated his three sons... and divorced his wife. Those of us who knew him... loved him. We were saddened by his decision to choose sin over family and ministry. Many of us tried to connect with him. Kept loving him. After several years of living an unrighteous life... his world fell apart... as so often those lives do. Last month I saw him and his wife sitting together in a church service. He came up to those of us who tried to restore him... and thanked us. Our wonderful God and our restoring love helped to begin the process to turn that relationship around. It is still a work in progress... but we did what the early church did... left the 99 and sought the one.

Transition: So, what do you choose today... to believe in powerful praying and God’s miraculous work... or not to believe and to overlook the Bible’s evidence? Here’s two stories to define your faith...

Our Response:

The first story is a boy coming home from Sunday School telling his parents how Moses and the Israelites crossed the Red Sea. He described how the Israelites **built bridges for their jeeps to**

cross the sea. Then, as Pharaoh's army crossed the bridges, **the bridge was booby-trapped**, exploded and the whole Egyptian army was destroyed.

The father asked his excited son, if that was really the way it happened. And the boy responded, "No, but if I told you what they really said at church, you wouldn't believe it."

Or maybe you could believe like the second story of a Mother and two daughters in Kenya: The mother and the two young daughters were saved by Christians and were returning home after baptismal service. They were praying for their husband and father who was a fearful demon-possessed man. They were singing and rejoicing as they approached the door. He was waiting for them to get home so he could kill them, **But God convicted him because of their singing.** When the girls entered the house... he fell on his knees and repented right there.

Transition: Are you like the boy who couldn't believe the miracle of the Red Sea... or are you someone who believes in a God who convicts a demon-possessed man!!

Challenge:

My challenge to you is for you to let God overhaul your belief.

- Overhaul your unbelief by expanding our concept of God's power. (Authentic worship)
- Overhaul your unbelief by practicing the prayer of the impossible. (Prayerful Boldness)
- Overhaul your unbelief by confessing our desperation for God's presence. (Humble Trust)