

OUR PRAYERS ANSWERED

TEXT: I JOHN 5:14, 15

INTRODUCTION:

1. These two verses deal with the privilege of prayer, and the power of prayer. Assurance is one of the great themes of this epistle (cf. 5:12, 13), and this certainly applies to prayer (5:14, 15).
2. Prayer is the chief instrument for getting God's will done here on earth. Certain things will not get done unless you and I pray for it.
3. We see many examples of this in Scripture -- in the prayers of Abraham, Moses, Elijah, Daniel, Paul, and many others.
4. Some people think God's will is done automatically, but that is not true. Our Lord told His disciples, "After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven" (Matthew 6:9, 10). We are told to pray for God's will to be done.
5. The reason God's will is not being done in earth as it is in heaven is many Christians are not praying effectively.
6. Effective prayers are answered (I John 5:14, 15).
7. James uses the example of Elijah's effective prayers in defeating the Baal-worship of Queen Jezebel and King Ahab. James 5:16 says, "The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much."

I. THE CONFIDENCE (5:14)

1. Verse 14 says, "And this is the confidence that we have in him..." This is the fourth time we see the word "confidence" in this epistle. In I John 4:17 the word is translated "boldness" (cf. I John 2:28; 3:21).
2. The word means we can pray boldly, openly and frankly. It means "freedom in speaking, unreservedness in speech."
3. Hebrews 4:16 says, "Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need."
4. We can come boldly, with confidence, because God is our father. We are "born of God" (5:1), and fathers love to listen to the prayers of their children (cf. Luke 11:13).
5. The Bible repeatedly teaches that we should have confidence that our prayers will be answered (cf. I John 3:22).
6. George Muller said: "Prayer is not overcoming God's reluctance. It is laying hold of His willingness."

7. J. Vernon McGee said, "Prayer is not to persuade God to do something that He didn't intend to do; prayer is to get you and me in line with the program of God."
8. Faith gives us this confidence (cf. I John 5:13).
9. Our Lord said in Mark 11:23, "For verily I say unto you, That whosoever shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; and shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe that those things which he saith shall come to pass; he shall have whatsoever he saith."
10. Our Lord said in John 14:13, 14, "And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it."
11. These Scriptures strengthen our faith and give us confidence.

II. THE CONDITION (5:14b)

1. This is the only condition. God promises to give us "whatsoever we ask" as long as it is "according to His will" (5:14, 15).
2. W.H. Griffith Thomas said, "Prayer does not reduce God to our level, but lifts us to His" (*The Apostle John*).
3. It is important that we understand the will of God so that we can pray intelligently. There must be a full surrender to the perfect will of God (cf. Romans 8:26, 27).
4. Psalm 37:4 and 5 says, "Delight thyself also in the LORD: and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart. Commit thy way unto the LORD; trust also in him; and he shall bring it to pass."
5. When a Christian is delighting himself (or herself) in the LORD, God's will becomes his will, and I John 5:14 and 15 says, "And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us..."
6. I think many prayers go unanswered because Christians are out of the will of God. God has revealed His will to us in His Word. James 1:5 says, "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him."
7. "But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord" (James 1:6, 7).
8. We must have faith -- "But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering" (James 1:6).
12. Our Lord said in Matthew 21:22, "And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive."

13. This condition -- "according to His will" (I John 5:14) has puzzled Christians. Andrew Murray said, "One of the greatest hindrances to believing prayer is with many undoubtedly this: they know not if what they ask is according to the will of God. As long as they are in doubt on this point, they cannot have the boldness to ask in the assurance that they certainly shall receive" (*With Christ in the School of Prayer*).
14. Andrew Murray said this condition is not given to create doubts, but to strengthen our faith -- "It is to give us courage thus to persevere and to be strong in faith."
15. R.A. Torrey said, "We can know the will of God with absolute certainty in many cases when we pray. How can we know the will of God? In the first place, we may know the will of God by the promises in His Word. The Bible was given us for the specific purpose of revealing to us the will of God, and when we find that anything is definitely promised in the Word of God we know that that is His will, for He has said so in so many words. And when we who believe on the name of the Son of God go to God and ask Him for anything that is definitely promised in His Word, we may know with absolute certainty that God has heard our prayer and that what we have asked of God is granted. We do not have to feel it -- God says so, and that is enough" (*The Prayer of Faith*).

III. THE CONSEQUENCE (5:14b; 15)

1. "He heareth us" (5:14b). "And if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him" (5:15).
2. This means we can know our prayer was answered -- "we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him" (5:15b). This speaks of personal assurance of the answer even though the actual fulfillment has not yet arrived.
3. Our Lord said in Mark 11:24, "Therefore I say unto you, What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them." The Bible teaches us that belief in the outcome precedes the actual answer to the prayer.
4. Hannah knew God had given her a son even before he was conceived. First Samuel 1:1-20). Elijah knew it would not rain for three and a half years (I Kings 17:1; James 5:17).
5. Prayer is simple. Our Lord said, "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you" (Luke 11:9).
6. James 4:2 says, "Ye have not, because ye ask not."

CONCLUSION:

1. In the year 1854 a sailing vessel was becalmed in the vicinity of New Guinea. Seeing the distressed look on the captain's face as he peered intently into the sea, Hudson Taylor, on his way to China for the first time, asked him why he was anxious.
2. The captain replied, "A four-knot current is carrying us swiftly toward some sunken reefs over there. Our fate seems to be sealed."
7. On the shores of the island, cannibals were rushing about and lighting fires, anticipating a shipwreck and a great feast.
8. Presently the captain spoke again, "We have done everything that can be done."
9. "No," responded Hudson Taylor, "there is one thing we haven't done. Four of us on board are Christians. Let each of us retire to his cabin and in agreed prayer ask the Lord to give us a breeze immediately."
10. This was agreed upon and done. After a few minutes of earnest intercessory prayer, Hudson Taylor came up on deck confident that their petition had been granted.
11. Finding the first officer, a godless man, in charge, he requested him to let down the corners of the mainsail. "What would be the good of that?" he asked.
12. Hudson Taylor told him that he and three others had been asking God to send a wind, that it was coming immediately and that there was not a minute to lose, since they were so near the reefs.
13. With a look of contempt, the officer replied with an oath: "Nonsense! You can't pray up a wind."
14. Noticing a few moments later that the topmost sail was beginning to tremble, he said: "That is only a cat's-paw — a mere puff of wind."
15. "Never mind what you think," cried Hudson Taylor. "Let down the mainsail quickly."
16. This he now agreed to do. Hearing the heavy footsteps of the men on deck, the captain came up from his cabin and saw that the breeze had indeed come.
17. In a few minutes they were sailing away from the dangerous reefs, much to the disappointment of the cannibals on the beach.
18. Later, Hudson Taylor wrote these words about that experience, "Thus God encouraged me, ere landing on China's shores, to bring every variety of need to Him in prayer, and to expect that He would honor the name of the Lord Jesus and give the help which each emergency required."

