

## **THE POWER OF PRAYER**

Joshua 10: 12-14, Luke 18: 10-14, Jonah 2: 1-10, Luke 23:20-23, 32-34, 39-43  
and II Thessalonians 3: 1-3 – Pastor Richard P. Carlson

Today, I come to you with fresh thanksgiving for the power of prayer, the power of all of you praying in church, on the prayer chain. Today, Wanda Kinch who was lifeflighted to Salt Lake City on Friday afternoon is with us in church, because of the power of prayer. God listens and answers prayer. I come to you with news that Ashley Palmer, who was essentially gone on Friday morning, spoke with me on Saturday morning. She desperately needs more and more prayer, but oh, the power of prayer. Only a miracle of God let Ashley make it through. She still has many physical and emotional hurdles to overcome, but oh, the power of prayer. God answers prayer. Keep on praying for Ashley who is 24 years old.

I once read a story about a little boy who was busy drawing a picture of God. His mother gently chided him saying, “No one has seen God, my son. We don’t know what He looks like.” Her son replied, “We will when I get through drawing this picture.” Most of us are just about as uncertain of all that prayer is, all that prayer does, and all of its power. No message can fully expound or exhaust the purpose or the power of prayer. But when I am through with this message today, I hope we all know a little bit more about what prayer is, and what its power is. For many of us, prayer is our religious heritage. We have grown up from earliest days, praying before meals, before meetings, before bedtime, before sports events, before graduations and baccalaureates and before surgery. When we pray before meals, we are thanking God for His supply for us to eat. When Jesus prayed to the Father and blessed five loaves and two fish, it was far more than praying in thanksgiving. It was a prayer asking the Father to multiply the five loaves and the two fish to feed a multitude. When Jesus finished praying, He handed out the fish and bread and it multiplied in His hands. There was far more than enough food for 5,000 men, plus all the women and children in that mighty multitude, and twelve bushel style baskets full of leftovers were picked up. Annie Johnson Flint wrote, “Though scarce enough for one it seemed, He blessed and made it more, more than enough.”

When push comes to shove in our lives, most all of us pray, whether we understand prayer or not. Prayer springs from our lips instinctively, instantaneously, and impulsively in the face of emergency, necessity, and perplexity. Atheists are not atheists in foxholes. When we are pushed beyond our limits, we hurry out of our comfort zones to pray. We all resort to prayer in the extreme times of life. Most of us know full well that prayer is not calling God’s attention to things He knows nothing about. God doesn’t need any of us to remind Him or inform Him of our

needs or to ask Him to do His duty when we pray to Him asking in faith. We learn as we pray that God wants us to speak our minds to Him without worrying about what we say or how we say it. Whether our prayers spring out of anxious fears or angry thoughts, God hears us and He turns our prayers by His power into answers that transcend our wildest thoughts and dreams. Prayer is powerful and when we pray, we have one more chance to see God at work. That is the business of prayer.

Reading the Gospels, it is impossible to miss the fact that Jesus was forever praying to His Father. As we read more closely, it is not a secret why Jesus had power in prayer. He prayed out of dependence. Do we pray out of dependence upon the Father as Jesus did? Jesus told His disciples in John 5: 30, "I can do nothing on My own." Prayer was the environment in which Jesus lived. He lived in total dependence upon His Father. It was the air He breathed. Hassled by continual interruptions, busy beyond comparison, without time to eat, being resisted and reproached by both His friends and His foes, Jesus still remained engaged in conversation with His Father. He kept keeping in touch with His Father always. Every situation for Him was an occasion for prayer. Prayer was Christ's principal work. By prayer, Jesus carried on His other many assignments. Jesus' life was continuous prayer. He lived without demands, only with dependent trust on His Father, no clamoring for the Father's attention, but only total quiet trust and continual reliance on the Father who always heard Him. Before Jesus raised Lazarus alive from the grave, where he had been four days rotting in the grave, Jesus prayed. When the stone was removed from the tomb of Lazarus, Jesus lifted up his eyes, and prayed, John 11: 41, 42 and said, "Father, I thank You, that You have heard Me. I knew that You always hear Me, but I said this on account of the people standing around, that they may believe that You sent Me." The essence and the quintessence of all of life is prayer. Jesus was never without it. Jesus was never without prayer's power. In Jesus, ultimately, we come to understand the power of prayer. Nevertheless, prayer saturates the books of the Bible, and we can see before Christ, and after Him, true believers in the Lord who were pray-ers, prayer warriors, intercessors, and champions in prayer. Today, I want us to explore just three of the myriads of ways God shows us the power of prayer as He answers.

**GOD SHOWS US THE POWER OF PRAYER BY BEING WILLING TO LISTEN TO US AS SINFUL MEN, WOMEN, BOYS AND GIRLS.** (I.) From the beginning of the Old Testament, God's people prayed. The very first mention of prayer in the Bible began with God getting Abraham and Sarah out of a jam because Abraham lied to King Abimelech of Gerar. Abraham said of Sarah, a beautiful older woman, that she was his sister. We hear the account in Genesis 20: 1-18. "From there Abraham journeyed toward the territory of the Negeb and lived

between Kadesh and Shur; and he sojourned in Gerar. And Abraham said of Sarah his wife, "She is my sister." And Abimelech king of Gerar sent and took Sarah. But God came to Abimelech in a dream by night and said to him, "Behold, you are a dead man because of the woman whom you have taken, for she is a man's wife." Now Abimelech had not approached her. So he said, "Lord, will you kill an innocent people? Did he not himself say to me, 'She is my sister'? And she herself said, 'He is my brother.' In the integrity of my heart and the innocence of my hands I have done this." Then God said to him in the dream, "Yes, I know that you have done this in the integrity of your heart, and it was I who kept you from sinning against me. Therefore I did not let you touch her. Now then, return the man's wife, for he is a prophet, **so that he will pray for you,** and you shall live. But if you do not return her, know that you shall surely die, you and all who are yours." So Abimelech rose early in the morning and called all his servants and told them all these things. And the men were very much afraid. Then Abimelech called Abraham and said to him, "What have you done to us? And how have I sinned against you, that you have brought on me and my kingdom a great sin? You have done to me things that ought not to be done." And Abimelech said to Abraham, "What did you see, that you did this thing?" Abraham said, "I did it because I thought, 'There is no fear of God at all in this place, and they will kill me because of my wife.' Besides, she is indeed my sister, the daughter of my father though not the daughter of my mother, and she became my wife. And when God caused me to wander from my father's house, I said to her, 'This is the kindness you must do me: at every place to which we come, say of me, "He is my brother.'" Then Abimelech took sheep and oxen, and male servants and female servants, and gave them to Abraham, and returned Sarah his wife to him. And Abimelech said, "Behold, my land is before you; dwell where it pleases you." To Sarah he said, "Behold, I have given your brother a thousand pieces of silver. It is a sign of your innocence in the eyes of all who are with you, and before everyone you are vindicated." **Then Abraham prayed to God, and God healed Abimelech, and also healed his wife and female slaves so that they bore children. For the LORD had closed all the wombs of the house of Abimelech because of Sarah, Abraham's wife.**

From the first mention of prayer in the Old Testament, God shows us He gives power to His people to pray, and receive answers, even if they have sinned against Him, as Abraham did by lying, telling a half-truth, and deceiving a king. God listens to the voice of His children, men, women, boys and girls. This morning we looked at the prayer of Joshua for the sun to stand still to give him enough time to destroy the enemy before nightfall. We read in Joshua 10 13, 14, "The sun stopped in the midst of heaven and did not hurry to set for about a whole day. There has been no day like it before or since, when the Lord heeded the voice of a man, for

the Lord fought for Israel.” Many years ago, our church used volunteer help to pour our parking lot. That late afternoon and evening, as the first of many cement trucks were on their way from west Green River, the sky grew dark black and purple. It was clearly a storm pointed right at us as we were pouring concrete, bull-floating, troweling and it looked like a disaster in the making. Jim Springsteel was the foreman on the job. He yelled above the machinery to me as Pastor. He yelled, “My job is pouring this cement and laying this concrete.” Pointing to the heavens in the southwest, he yelled, “That’s your job!” Thanks, Jim. Seldom have I been any more on the spot. I breathed a prayer silently to the Lord, and screamed out, “Storm, go south!” I will never forget what God did in that extremity. The storm went south and our full parking lot of cars are parked on that parking lot we got poured. Oh, the power of prayer! God listens to our voices as we pray. Secondly,

**GOD SHOWS US THE POWER OF PRAYER BY LISTENING TO OUR PRAYERS WHEN WE DEEPLY DESERVE TO DIE.** (II.)

It’s one thing to believe that God answers the prayers of each of us who are sinners when we sin. It is another thing to think that He listens to our prayers when we have proved to be one of the worst of stubborn, rebellious, and defiant sinners. Sometimes I wince as I read the Hall of Faith in Hebrews 11 and realize who is there. There are two adulterers, David, after his sin with Bathsheba and his murder of her husband, one of his mighty men, Uriah the Hittite. Then I read about a fornicator and adulterer and whoremonger, Samson. Against his parent’s wishes, he took a wife of the Philistines, a young lady of parents in Timnath. Samson forgot his Nazarite vow. He married into the enemy camp. Then one day Judges 13-16 tells us Samson went to Gaza and went in to a prostitute. When the house was surrounded, Samson arose at midnight and carried the gates of the city to the top of a hill in front of Hebron. Then this married man who was a whoremonger, fell in love with Delilah, a woman in the valley of Sorek. She finally inveigled him to tell the secret of his unmatched strength. Soon this man who deserved to die, forsook his rearing by Godly parents. This man had his head shaved, and his eyes gouged out. He was the sport of the Philistines at a great sacrificial day to their god, Dagon. They rejoiced saying, “Our god has given Samson our enemy into our hand.” In Gaza, Samson served in the place of oxen, blind, and in bronze shackles, and he ground at the prison mill. But the hair of his Nazarite vowed head began to grow again, after it had been shaved. This was the head of the man whose barren mother, the wife of Manoah, had prayed for and the angel of the Lord had promised. On that feast day, they called for Samson to be their sport, their entertainment to mock in his blindness with his eyes gouged out. We read, in Judges 16: 25-30, “And when their hearts were merry, they said, “Call Samson, that he may entertain us.” So they called Samson out of the prison, and he entertained them. They made him stand

between the pillars. And Samson said to the young man who held him by the hand, "Let me feel the pillars on which the house rests, that I may lean against them." Now the house was full of men and women. All the lords of the Philistines were there, and on the roof there were about 3,000 men and women, who looked on while Samson entertained. (That is until this immoral rebel prayed.) Then Samson called to the LORD and said, "O Lord GOD, please remember me and please strengthen me only this once, O God, that I may be avenged on the Philistines for my two eyes." And Samson grasped the two middle pillars on which the house rested, and he leaned his weight against them, his right hand on the one and his left hand on the other. And Samson said, "Let me die with the Philistines." Then he bowed with all his strength, and the house fell upon the lords and upon all the people who were in it. So the dead whom he killed at his death were more than those whom he had killed during his life." One last prayer from a loose immoral whoremonger who forgot God was enough to bring the house down and fulfill the prayers of Manoah, his wife and all Israel. And whose prayer did God hear who had believed in the Lord and hid the Israeli spies in Jericho? Just one prayer she spoke out loud praying to the Lord and before His servants, the spies. Rahab the harlot said, "Please swear to me by the God above and the earth beneath that you will deal kindly with me and save alive my father and mother and brothers and sisters and all who belong to them and deliver us from death. Isn't God amazing? Jesus is willing to call Himself the Son of David. Samson shows up in the Hebrews Hall of Faith. Rahab becomes a part of the godly line of Jesus and is in the Hall of Faith. We heard it read in Jonah 2: 1-10, that the most stubborn preacher of righteousness God ever called, Jonah, prayed in the belly of a great fish, and God made the fish not be able to take any more of that rotten preacher—that fish delivered Jonah by mouth, vomiting him up on the shores of Nineveh and the whole city of millions repented. God spared the city because Jonah finally prayed when he should have been digested to become tuna fish. Beloved, oh, the power of prayer! Oh, how praying rests the weary, Prayer will change the night to day. So when life seems dark and dreary, Jonah, and all of you, don't forget to pray.

When Cain killed Abel, Genesis 4: 7 records God talked to him saying, "Why are you angry and why has your face fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not well, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is for you, but you must rule over it." Cain didn't talk to God or pray to him. Rather he spoke to Abel his brother and killed him. "When your heart was filled with anger, Did you think to pray? Did you plead for grace my brother, That you might forgive another who had crossed your way?" There was no less anger in Jonah than in Cain, but Jonah prayed, and oh, the power of prayer. Thirdly, and lastly,

## **GOD SHOWS US THE POWER OF PRAYER BY LISTENING TO OUR HELL-BOUND SPIRITS AS WE CRY FOR MERCY AND FORGIVENESS.**

(III.) We heard in II Thessalonians 3: 1-3 today the words of Paul, “Finally, brothers, pray for us, that the Word of the Lord may speed ahead and be honored, as happened among you, and that we may be delivered from wicked and evil men, for not all have faith. But the Lord is faithful. He will establish you and guard you against the evil one.” So how does God deliver us from wicked hell-bound sinners like we once were? One of His main ways is by saving them. Today, we heard the texts in Luke 18 about the prayer of the publican and in Luke 23, the prayer of the murderous repentant thief. We read in Luke 18: 13, “And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, “God, be merciful to me, a sinner.” The proud Pharisee who compared himself in his self-righteousness before God, found God didn’t hear his arrogance. Interestingly, the word merciful, is found only twice in the New Testament. The Greek word **hilaskomai** is found only here in Luke 18: 13 and in Hebrews 2: 17 where we find Jesus to be a Merciful and faithful High Priest. Hilaskomai means to pray for God to atone for our sins and make reconciliation for them. This tax-gatherer who robbed and thieved, knew his sin, and confessed it at the temple, beating his breast, and God not only delivered him, but thousands of people who would soon have been robbed by his exorbitant demanded taxes.

We read out of Luke 23 about the mocking thieves and one of them repented as he was dying on the cross. Jesus had prayed for his executioners and all of us as they nailed His hands and feet, “Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.” The Father heard that prayer as the repentant thief prayed a sinner’s prayer as did the publican. He confessed to his fellow thief that both of them justly deserved to die, but he said of Jesus, “This man has done nothing wrong. And he said, Jesus, remember me when You come into Your kingdom.” And Jesus said to him, “Truly I say to you, today, you will be with me in Paradise.” Oh, the power of prayer for hell-bound sinners. And guess who repented at the cross, confessing Christ? Mark 15: 39 tells us, “And when the centurion, (in charge of Jesus’s crucifixion) who stood facing Him, saw how Jesus breathed His last, he confessed, saying, “Truly this man was the Son of God.” In Braila, near the Danube River, I asked my interpreter, Cristi Tepesh to speak to seven men. He said, “See they are drunkards.” I said, “Please translate.” Six men left, one stayed, Daniel, and he listened. He was not drunk. Today he is a preacher in Romania. Beside the Danube, a young woman was bending over the river. I asked to speak to her. She was about to drown herself in the river. She repented and received Jesus, like Daniel, Daniela had never heard the Gospel before. Soon this new born again young university lady was on board a ship to Macin. God heard her very wish. She said, “Here I sat by the water wishing

there was a God, and if there was, that he would reveal Himself. And now just as I am thinking this, you have come. What a glorious conversion! What does God want to do with hell-bound sinners? In India, 22 men surrounded me and my interpreter, Tendi. Tendi asked me if I still wanted to preach in this hostile village where believers had been slain for their faith. I told him, "I may never be here again." When I said the name of Jesus, 16 men left, and six stayed, receiving the Lord as their Savior. Oh, the power of prayer! This past week, into my office walked a man, age 36, Michael David Schumacher with long, long dreadlocks that have been growing for 12 years with a 19 year old woman he is living with, Maureen Lindsey James, in dreadlocks, 28 weeks pregnant. They drove up in a yellow Blue-bird school bus. I shared the Gospel with them after helping them with gas to get home to Idaho Springs, Colorado, that little town on I-70 that is 3 blocks wide and 3 miles long. I prayed and God opened their hearts. They asked Jesus into their lives. That's what God does—and it is the most powerful response to prayer in all the world. There is no greater miracle and power of God than when He answers prayer and hell-bound sinners are forgiven. God can heal our land and that would be a mighty miracle, but no miracle is more powerful than God saving our lost souls. Are you born again, washed in the blood. Let's pray!