

WHY PRAY?
Message 2
Scripture: Mark 11:20-24

INTRO: Why pray? What a simple question! What a difficult subject! Who of us would dare say prayer is not very important? Who of us can say, "My life shows it is important?" It seems almost sacrilegious to keep track of how much time we spend praying. But maybe it would be OK, just for our own personal benefit sometime to keep track of the time we spend in prayer. And then say, "Here is a very important practice. Now let me see, I have 1,440 minutes every day, and I pray so or so many minutes. From that, how important would it seem, prayer is in my life?"

Now I know you cannot judge the effectiveness of a person's prayer life by the time they spend in it. Some spend a lot of time counting beads doing it and they have wasted time, if not actually sinned. But how many things can you pray about in five minutes, or even ten. How important is prayer in my life?

But our subject is, why pray at all? Why does God require prayer? We viewed this from God's perspective in the last message, and proposed that God requires prayer because if He gave us all we need without prayer, His glory and His righteousness would be at stake. Now we want to view this question from man's perspective. Why is it necessary for us to pray to receive things from God? If God knows what we need before ask, why would He require us to pray?

II. VIEWED FROM MAN'S PERSPECTIVE

A. To Keep us Humble

Let me begin our first point by reading James 4:2, "You lust (or desire or want things) and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war. Yet you do not have because you do not ask." Here are people who want things. They desire things. But rather than pray they use every human means to bring them about, even so far as fighting and warring. And yet they do not have; they do not possess that which they desire. They covet and they get rid of those who are in their way, and yet they cannot obtain. They fight for what they want. They war, or cause a big ruckus for what they want, yet

they do not have. Do you know whom he is describing? Christians! But God says, "You do not have because you do not ask." Now I have said that asking is the very first step to receiving things from God. But, there is much more to prayer than asking, but asking is foundational.

Now go with me to 2 Chronicles 7. This is a familiar chapter. Solomon had dedicated that immense and beautiful temple he had built to the Lord God Almighty. The last 31 verses of chapter six give us the content of Solomon's prayer to God. Then, at night, God appeared to Solomon, in 7:12 and said, "I heard your prayer. And I have chosen this place for Myself as a house of sacrifice." Now look at verse 13 (read).

When man lives in sin and rebels against God, He has a way of getting their attention. He creates needs in their lives that they cannot overcome. You may say, "How do you know this is because of sin?" Because in verse 14 God says that if they turn from their wicked ways He will forgive their sin and heal their land. That is, He will cause it to rain again.

Now, when God gets man's attention by hard circumstances in life He is seeking to bring something about and He tells us exactly what that is in verse 14. "If My people, who are called by My name will humble themselves and pray..." Now here is a key why man must pray to get things. Before prayer, humility must happen.

You see, many of us are not much different than the prodigal son. In God's ordained circumstances, we learn to pray. And before we come to prayer, we must humble ourselves. Humility on man's part is one reason why God requires prayer.

We have to learn to be humble. Then, we have to learn to ask. Now I want to remind us that asking is only the first step. We know there is more to getting things from God than just asking because many times we ask but still do not receive. After step one, learning to pray, there is still more to learn. After learning to pray, we will have to learn what to believe and we will have to learn to know God's will.

We will have to learn to empty ourselves of our own desires, and we will have to learn to fall in line with the will of God. We will have to go to God's school of prayer!

But then, some of these Christians James was writing to, like many a Christian today, had learned to ask. But God was not pleased with their asking. You see, there is more to prayer than just asking. But they asked and they still did not receive. Why? Because they asked amiss! And what was wrong with their asking? James 4:3 tells us. What was on their hearts was not on God's heart. How many times is what is on our heart that which WE want, not that which God is so concerned about?

So, I propose to you that the first reason we need to pray, from man's perspective, is it requires humility; true humility. If God is to be glorified, it will be His will that must become most important. He must be exalted and we must be humbled. So humility always comes before prayer or the prayer may as well not be uttered. We, and our desires must be downsized, and minimized; and God's will and His desires must be exalted. God must be lifted up and deified before prayer can truly be effective. For this reason, prayer is required. True prayer requires true humility.

So, to learn to ask such things as God would answer we must become concerned about the things He is concerned about. So much of our praying is simply selfishness and God does not share His glory with us and so we must learn to ask according to His will. This means getting to know God!

So, one of the reasons prayer is required is humility. If God gave man everything man wanted without prayer, man would immediately become proud. And if proud man got what he wanted, he would never become saved. Never! All of salvation is at stake here. As a matter of fact, I would dare to say that the way many of us as Christians view prayer, if God gave us many of those things we pray for we would become proud in a very short time. I propose to you that it is for our good that He DOES not answer many of our prayers.

B. To Prepare Us To Receive

I mentioned in the first message that if God gave us all we need in life without our asking, He might well ruin us. And if God gave us all the things we ask for, He might ruin us as well. One of the reasons for that is that we are not ready to receive. We must become ready first. I first read about this in Wesley Duewel's book on prayer, I think, and have thought much about it since. I now think that that many times when we pray, it is only God's wisdom that keeps us from getting what we ask for. It may well be what we are asking for is good and even for God's glory, but God may know that in the long run we will become proud and we might in the end be ruined. So in His love and wisdom, He does not answer our godly request! We are not prepared yet to receive. As a matter of fact, the more I think about this, this may be one of the reasons we must persevere in prayer for a long time before He answers. And in our perseverance, we become ready to receive without becoming proud.

Now go with me to Mark 11 (read 20-24). There are many principles of prayer in this passage. The first is that we must ask. That requires humility. The second is to believe, and that requires a knowledge of God. Maybe next year I will speak about that under this question: Why does God require us to believe?

But let me make what I believe is an important point here. Answers to prayer are miracles. So let me first define what a miracle is. A miracle is when the laws of nature are set aside, and something happens that defies these laws. When Jesus healed a blind man, that was a miracle. It is beyond the laws of nature. Removing mountains is beyond the laws of nature. When you pray for a lost person and they get saved, a miracle has happened.

But let me ask this question: Who of us could exercise such power with God, and move mountains around, without becoming proud and abusing it? What am I saying? I am saying that God cannot do many great things through us because we are not ready to have it happen without it going to our heads. Man has

to be reduced to the deepest of humility before God can do great things through him. There are times when God can do great things through people who have been prepared to receive. George Mueller was such a man.

Could it be that there would be many more George Muellers, if people were ready to receive God's answers without becoming proud. Could it be that God would empower us to remove mountains if we were ready for God to get all the glory, and nobody ever knowing about our involvement in the miracle? The longer I study this, the more I see that God's glory is a very important factor in prayer. And before we are ready to let Him have all the glory, we must be prepared to rejoice in His getting that glory apart from any recognition for ourselves.

III. VIEWED FROM THE DEVIL'S PERSPECTIVE

Why pray? Why is prayer so important? Well, we have viewed this question from God's perspective and from man's perspective. Now let us view it from the devil's perspective. Let me illustrate this point. My son and I play the game Backgammon. While we are playing we are opponents. And I usually check through his options when it is his turn, and I know the move I least want him to make. Maybe there are a number of options that will make it tough for me, but I know the one I don't want him to make. I know the one I have the most trouble counteracting. Looking at the question, "Why Pray?" from Satan's perspective, we must realize we are his opponents. And there are many moves we can make, but the one he does not want us to make is prayer.

When we ask, "Why Pray?" and look at it from the devil's perspective I want to give this proposal: Our prayers are necessary in order for God to defeat the devil! Prayer is not the only thing God needs, but it is one of the major things He needs to rightfully defeat the devil.

When we look at our subject, "Why Pray?", as Christians, from the standpoint of Satan, we need to see that prayer plays a very important part for God to defeat Satan. Satan is our adversary. Satan hates Christians. On the other hand, we want to see him

lose as much ground as possible, knowing that he is out to steal, and to kill and to destroy. And if we want to defeat him wherever possible, and we want the biggest ammunition against him we can muster, we must learn to pray.

I want to take you to a passage that gives us a little window into prayer from the devil's perspective. Turn with me to Daniel 10 (read 1-3). Daniel is burdened for his nation, Israel. They are in captivity and the future of his nation has troubled him and he has requested of God an understanding of what is to happen. He fasted from pleasant food and meat and wine and prayed but no answer came. He prayed for a week, seven days; no answer. But he did not give up. He prayed for 2 weeks, but no answer. Most of us would quit by now, but he kept praying. He wanted the answer. And then, 21 days after he started praying, the answer came. Let us read verses 4-12.

Now verse 5 says Daniel saw a certain 'man'. Scholars are not certain whether this is a Christophany, an appearance of Christ or a very powerful angel. I expect it is an angel. If this is the Lord Jesus, we begin to get see how very powerful Satan is. But I think this is most likely a very powerful angel.

So, let me give you the gist of what I think happened in heaven when Daniel began to pray. God immediately called one of his chief angels, an angel with a lot of power and said, "Here is a message from Me to Daniel. See to it that he gets it as soon as possible." And then this angel left heaven and headed for planet earth. But the devil had found out about Daniel's prayer and he did not want him to understand the future. You see, the devil does not like us to know what will happen in the future, that is obvious here. And the devil called one of his powerful angels, the one that caused the land of Ahmadinjadad, or Iran today, to resist the truth of God which gave the devil a lot of power in this land. And why did the devil send this demon of Persia? Because the prophecy relates to what the devil is planning to do there. You can read that for yourself. And so the devil said to this demon, "So and so is coming from God to give Daniel a message. It will be in your best

interest to stop him. See to it that he does not get to Daniel. Do whatever you have to, for however long you have to, to stop him."

A conflict ensued in the heavenlies, all because a man of God made a request to know something from God. And they battled and battled. This went on many days. And then Michael, another powerful angel in heaven was sent to help out, and together these angels broke through. Then this first angel brought the message to Daniel. So let us read verses 12-14 (read).

Now, in this account we get a little window into the spiritual realm and the battle that goes on between God and Satan when God wants to answer prayers. And we see that prayer opened the way for God to be able to send a message to Daniel, a message, no doubt, He dearly wanted Daniel to know.

It is no doubt that Daniel 10 is one of the passages Wesley Deuwel had in mind in his book, "Mighty Prevailing Prayer", when he gave the following paragraphs I now want to read for us. He writes in a section he has titled, "Prayer the Nemesis of Satan: There is nothing on earth that Satan so fears as prayer. He does not know how to cope with prayer, so he concentrates on keeping you from prayer or getting you to give up before you get prayer's answer. He can often manipulate persons and circumstances so as to delay prayer's answers, but he cannot stop the angels from bringing God's answers. Prayer is his nemesis. He cannot triumph over prevailing prayer. Satan is more afraid of your praying than your pure life or zealous witness. One's life may be a beautiful witness that cannot be silenced, but prayer is a militant force that has the potential of defeating Satan, destroying his works, and driving him out of places and lives he claims as his own" (233). After I read that, I looked up the word 'nemesis' and the dictionary said it was, "An unusually tenacious and fearsome opponent or antagonist."

In another place he writes, "Prevailing prayer is God's ordained means for extending His kingdom, for defeating Satan and his empire of darkness and evil, and for fulfilling God's eternal plan and bringing into effect His good will on earth" (pg. 13).

Now ponder for a moment what would have happened if Daniel had quit praying after 2 weeks. But he prayed until the answer came. So we have the song that says, "Till the answer comes, gotta keep praying." This is called, 'praying through'. Let me ask you a question to make you think. Do you think the devil always loses when God seeks to answer a prayer? Do you think if we pray for something very important, and then give up after a few prayers that God will still answer that prayer?

Now we learn some very important things about prayer in this passage, and some important principles as relates to Satan. First, Satan opposes God's answers to prayer. Second, when it is a very important prayer, very powerful demons are sent to thwart the answers. And it seems to me in such cases, if one stops praying, the devil wins and the answer does not come. Further, if we persevere for important answers, God will exert greater and greater forces against Satan.

Let me give us an example of something we might pray for but the answer is very complicated and difficult. Probably among the most important prayers we can pray is for the salvation of a lost person. We know from Scripture we are praying in God's will if we are praying for the lost. But, God may not be able to answer that prayer because He will not violate that person's free will. So, we begin to pray, and God begins to work. The devil also works. Let us say this person is an alcoholic. The devil already has a huge advantage. Actually, he has this person in one of his prisons.

So, we are praying, and God is working. At every opportunity He convicts this person. But the opportunities are scarce because of the bondage the person is in. But slowly, God is gaining ground against the devil. But now some years have gone by and the one praying has given up. What happens? Who wins?

Some time ago I was listening to Dr. David Jeremiah. And he said something to the effect that after reading this account in Daniel 10 he spent time, not

only praying for things, but praying against Satan. We pray for many things, but do we pray against Satan?

Listen to Luke 10:2. Here is what it says, "Then He said to them, 'The harvest truly *is* great, but the laborers are few; therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest.'" Surely we must ask ourselves this question: "If the need is so great, and God knows it, why does He not just send out workers?" But, if my propositions have been correct, we know why He cannot just send out laborers. He needs us to pray for laborers. When we pray diligently for laborers, we release Him to do what He already greatly desires to do.

Let me read the quote from Deuwel once more that I read earlier, "Prevailing prayer is God's ordained means for extending His kingdom, for defeating Satan and his empire of darkness and evil, and for fulfilling God's eternal plan and bringing into effect His good will on earth" (pg. 13). God wants to extend His kingdom. He wants to save the lost. He wants to defeat Satan in as many areas as He can. But one of the ways we limit the working of God is by our failure to pray. When we pray we give Him the right to do what He already greatly desires to do.

There they are, thousands dying each day without the knowledge of the Gospel, and then begins an eternity in hell. God desires above all our desires that they be saved. But to be saved, they must receive His message so they can believe and be saved. And to receive this message, somebody must take it to them and explain it in an understandable fashion. Sometimes this means spending many years without any fruit among a certain group of people. So the sending forth of laborers must take place. Then the laborers must become willing. Then they may need to be faithful with that message for years. And then, when we have prayed, and God has sent, then it may still happen that Satan messes with their message or methods, and God's true message still does not penetrate hearts controlled by Satan. But, thank God, some do get through with the true message and some are saved. When I look at my own prayer life, or

observe the church prayer meeting, I am amazed as much happens as is happening.

In our own community are many people who will be lost because those who know the need did not prevail in prayer. Let me ask you, are you one of those praying for some lost soul and you have prayed for a long time and nothing is happening? Are you about ready to give up? Or maybe you have already given up? Then start again, and pray until death tells you which way it will go. Are you praying for someone with some stubborn habit, and you wish them to become free? Then do not give up. Do you have a wayward son or daughter? Do you have a son or daughter into things that grieve you? Pray, and do not give up. When you pray for a short while and give up, you are not much of a threat to the devil. When you do not give up, it is then that you are a nemesis to Satan.

Let me give part of the quote I read earlier again about Satan, "He can often manipulate persons and circumstances so as to delay prayer's answers, but he cannot stop the angels from bringing God's answers. Prayer is his nemesis. He cannot triumph over prevailing prayer."

So when we look at the question, "Why pray?" from the perspective of Satan, I would say that our prayers, when prayed right and in His will, enable God to unleash His power against Satan. When we do not pray much, even though we may live otherwise godly lives, we are not a great hindrance to Satan's workings. When we do pray consistently, we become an opponent to Satan that he does not know how to handle. We become a very useful tool in the hands of God.

CONCL: Now before I close I want to say something I feel impressed to say. I gave these messages to encourage us to pray, both corporately and privately. But I sensed after the last message that possibly I had pushed the importance of the prayer meeting and some might feel obligated to attend out of pressure. I want to correct that. Listen, if you came last year and you do not wish to come this year, ask God what He would have you do this year. And please do not feel like you are deserting us if you wish to join a Bible study group. Where I do want to apply pressure is to urge you to grow in your personal prayer life. And if you

lead a Bible study group, make sure that prayer is a part of it. So pray and ask God what He would have you to do with regard to the church prayer meeting. And please know that you are always welcome at the Wednesday prayer meeting.

So, let us conclude. Why pray? Last Sunday we looked at this question from God's perspective. Having created us free moral agents, I suggested that if He gave us all we needed without our needing to ask for it, that His glory and His righteousness would be at stake.

But viewing it from man's perspective, prayer is required because we are so prone to pride. When we pray we put God in His rightful place and we place ourselves under Him, as being dependent on Him. And furthermore, if we got all we asked for, again we are in the danger of pride. So, there are times when we must prevail in prayer for some time in order to prepare us to receive the answer without the danger of pride.

But when we look at this question from the viewpoint of our great enemy the devil, we find that prayer is what he fears above all else. By prayer we unleash the power of God against him and this is what he fears.

Well, as we close, I want to remind us that God is still in the business of doing miracles through prayer. In our prayer meeting evenings we prepare beforehand by reading a chapter in Wesley Duewel's book, "Mighty Prevailing Prayer." To encourage us to continue to pray, I want to read an account out of this book I would not dare read if I did not have the greatest confidence that this writer would not give it if there was any question about it. He retells an account which he heard from somebody else. So he writes, "Charles Blanchard, who was president of Wheaton College for forty three years, shares this testimony, which he heard in person and later verified."

And here is the story: "Friends, about two and a half years ago I was in the hospital in Philadelphia. I was an engineer on the Pennsylvania Lines, and although I had a praying wife, I had all my life been a sinful man. At this time I was very ill. I became greatly wasted. I weighed less than one hundred pounds.

"Finally the doctor who was attending me said to my wife that I was dead, but she said: 'No, he is not dead. He cannot be dead. I have prayed for him for twenty-seven years and God has promised me that he would be saved. Do you think God would let him die now after I have prayed twenty-seven years and God has promised, and he is not saved?' 'Well,' the doctor replied, 'I do not know anything about that, but I know that he is dead.' And the screen was drawn around the cot, which in the hospital separates between the living and the dead.

"To satisfy my wife, other physicians were brought, one after another, until seven were about the cot, and each one of them as he came up and made the examination confirmed that I was dead. Meanwhile my wife was kneeling by the side of the cot, insisting that I was not dead, -that if I were dead God would bring me back, for He had promised her that I should be saved and I was not yet saved. By and by her knees began to pain her, kneeling on the hard hospital floor. She asked the nurse for a pillow and the nurse brought her a pillow upon which she kneeled.

"One hour, two hours, three hours passed. The screen still stood by the cot. I was lying there still, apparently dead. Four hours, five hours, six hours, seven hours, thirteen hours passed and all this while my wife was kneeling by the cot side, and when people remonstrated and wished her to go away she said, 'No, he has to be saved. God will bring him back if he is dead. He is not dead. He cannot die until he is saved.

"At the end of thirteen hours I opened my eyes, and she said, 'What did you wish my dear?' And I said, 'I wish to go home,' and she said: 'You shall go home.' But when she proposed it, the doctors raised their hands in horror. They said, "Why, it will kill him. It will be suicide.' She said: 'You have had your turn. You said he was dead already. I am going to take him home.'

"I weigh now 246 pounds. I still run a fast train on the Pennsylvania Lines. I have been out to Minneapolis on a little vacation, telling men what Jesus can do, and I am glad to tell you what Jesus can do."

So I close by rereading two verses of Scripture: Mark 1:35, "Now in the morning, having risen a long while before daylight, He went out and departed to a solitary place; and

there He prayed". Colossians 4:2, "Continue earnestly in prayer, being vigilante in it with thanksgiving."