

The Power of Prayer

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[0:00] 1 Kings 18, beginning in verse 1. This is the Word of God. After a long time in the third year, the Word of the Lord came to Elijah. Go and present yourself to Ahab, and I will send rain on the land.

So Elijah went to present himself to Ahab. Then skip down to verse 16. We'll read to the end of the chapter. So Obadiah went to meet Ahab and told him, and Ahab went to meet Elijah.

When he saw Elijah, he said to him, Is that you, you troubler of Israel? I have not made trouble for Israel, Elijah replied, but you and your father's family have. You have abandoned the Lord's commands and have followed the Baals.

Now summon the people from all over Israel to meet me on Mount Carmel, and bring the 450 prophets of Baal and the 400 prophets of Asherah who eat at Jezebel's table. So Ahab sent word throughout all Israel and assembled the prophets on Mount Carmel.

Elijah went before the people and said, How long will you waver between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow Him. But if Baal is God, follow Him. But the people said nothing.

[1:09] Then Elijah said to them, I am the only one of the Lord's prophets left, but Baal has 450 prophets. Get two bulls for us. Let them choose one for themselves and let them cut it into pieces and put it on the wood, but not set fire to it.

I will prepare the other bull and put it on the wood, but not set fire to it. Then you call on the name of your God and I will call on the name of the Lord. The God who answers by fire, He is God.

Then all the people said, What you say is good. Elijah said to the prophets of Baal, Choose one of the bulls and prepare it first, since there are so many of you. Call on the name of your God, but do not light the fire.

So they took the bull given them and prepared it. Then they called on the name of Baal from morning till noon. Oh, Baal, answer us, they shouted. But there was no response. No one answered.

And they danced around the altar they had made. At noon, Elijah began to taunt them. Shout louder, he said. Surely he is a God. Perhaps he is deep in thought or busy or traveling.

[2:13] Maybe he is sleeping and must be awakened. So they shouted louder and slashed themselves with swords and spears, as was their custom, until their blood flowed.

Midday passed, and they continued their frantic prophesying until the time for the evening sacrifice. But there was no response. No one answered.

No one paid attention. Then Elijah said to all the people, Come here to me. They came to him, and he repaired the altar of the Lord, which was in ruins. Elijah took twelve stones, one for each of the tribes, descended from Jacob, to whom the word of the Lord had come, saying, Your name shall be Israel.

With the stones he built an altar in the name of the Lord, and he dug a trench around it, large enough to hold two sals of wheat. He arranged the wood, cut the bull into pieces, and laid it on the wood.

Then he said to them, Fill four large jars with water, and pour it on the offering and on the wood. Do it again, he said, and they did it again. Do it a third time, he ordered.

[3:16] And they did it the third time. The water ran down around the altar and even filled the trench. At the time of sacrifice, the prophet Elijah stepped forward and prayed, O Lord, God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, let it be known today that You are God in Israel, and that I am Your servant and have done all these things at Your command.

Answer me, Lord, O Lord, answer me, so these people will know that You, O Lord, are God, and that You are turning their hearts back again. Then the fire of the Lord fell and burned up the

sacrifice, the wood, the stones, and the soil, and also licked up the water in the trench. When all the people saw this, they fell prostrate and cried, The Lord, He is God. The Lord, He is God. Then Elijah commanded them, Seize the prophets of Baal. Don't let anyone get away. They seized them. And Elijah had them brought down to the Kishon Valley and slaughtered there. And Elijah said to Ahab, Go, eat and drink, for there is the sound of a heavy rain. So Ahab went off to eat and drink, but Elijah climbed to the top of Carmel, bent down to the ground, and put his face between his knees.

Go and look toward the sea, he told his servant. And he went up and looked. There is nothing there, he said. Seven times, Elijah said, Go back. The seventh time, the servant reported, A cloud as small as a man's hand is rising from the sea.

[4 : 43] So Elijah said, Go and tell Ahab, Hitch up your chariot and go down before the rain stops you. Meanwhile, the sky grew black with clouds. The wind rose. A heavy rain came on, and Ahab rode off to Jezreel.

The power of the Lord came upon Elijah, and tucking his cloak into his belt, he ran ahead of Ahab all the way to Jezreel. Chapter 5 and verse 16.

We've not had that portion of Scripture read this morning since it's been read week by week, and instead we've read the passage that James is referring us to. But we turn as we continue our study in the book of James to chapter 5 and verse 16.

Are you in trouble? Then you should pray. Are you sin sick? Weak and weary from the battle? Then you should call the elders of the church and have them pray. Are you struggling with some sin? Then you should confess your sins to your brother, your sister, and pray for each other.

[5 : 58] That you may be healed, restored, refreshed, rejuvenated. And here at the end of his letter, then James is telling us that if his message has profited us, that it will increase our commitment to prayer.

Pray, pray, pray, and get the prayers of others. That's his message. In other words, the call to holiness is a call to prayer. That's James' call throughout this letter.

He's urging us to the all-out pursuit of holiness. And he's telling us that pursuit of holiness is a call to prayer because you can't make yourself more holy.

Indeed, all the aspects of holiness that we're to pursue in this letter are beyond our reach. consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds.

How many of you are up for that one? How many of you can handle that one? That's verse 2 of chapter 1. Oh, it's beyond us, isn't it? Keep a tight rein on your tongue.

[7 : 14] Can you do that? Can you handle that beast in your mouth? Keep yourself from being polluted by the world. Walk through this polluted world with its belching pollution and keep yourself from being defiled by it.

You ready for that one? Do all the good that you know to do, leaving nothing undone. no sins of omission. And oh yes, be sure to love your neighbor as you love yourself.

You see, there is not a command in this letter that does not exceed our reach. These things are impossible to us, left to ourselves. And so we're being called to do more than what we can produce. It's impossible. Indeed, for James, the normal Christian life is only possible with supernatural powers that are given.

You're going to have to get resources from heaven to live in the hot pursuit of holiness, to live the normal Christian life. And the good news is, is that God gives us more grace and he gives it in answer to prayer.

[8 : 34] prayer. You can't, but you must. And I can help, so pray. That's the message of James.

And there's one thing more that God wants me to know that I might be encouraged to pray, and that is the power of prayer. Not only my absolute need for prayer, I can't do these, any of these commands, I can't obey the book of James without this supernatural grace.

But there's this other sweet encouragement that comes to us that we should pray because of the power of prayer. And so before the letter ends, we have, first of all, the power of prayer stated, verse 16, and then the power of prayer illustrated, verses 17 and 18.

First, the power of prayer stated, it's the last half of verse 16, the prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.

James is convinced that the more we believe that, the more we will pray. Do you believe that the prayer of a righteous man is powerful?

[9 : 48] That's what he tells us. It has great power, great force. It's powerful not in itself, but because it engages the arm of omnipotence.

prayer is mighty because the God it engages is mighty, indeed almighty. What kind of power does it take to create a sun, an earth, a universe?

And God has created all things out of nothing by his powerful word. He spoke and nothing responded and became something.

He but speaks a word and a servant is healed. He commands victories for Jacob and on the field of battle, Israel wins.

Just a word of power from our God. And this all powerful God has put himself at your disposal, Christian, and said, now ask, seek me, knock on my door, pray to me.

[10 : 59] Because prayer is powerful. Prayer is powerful because God is powerful. And prayer is effective.

It's mighty in operation, in its working, in its effectiveness. It accomplishes much. It gets things done. It's a very practical word.

Not like the prayers of the priest of Baal on Mount Carmel, their prayers accomplished absolutely nothing. They prayed and prayed and prayed but there was no answer. Because there was no one to answer.

But when we pray, this almighty God in heaven answers and so prayer is powerful and prayer is effective. So James is holding before us the value of prayer.

prayer is powerful and effective because it is God, it engages God to work. Now just how powerful is prayer?

[12 : 06] Well, prayer can do what God can do. Prayer can do what God can do. Are all things possible with God? Then all things are possible with prayer, which engages this God to act on behalf of those who wait for him.

Isaiah 64 4. So prayer is powerful and effective because of the God that answers prayer.

We must never think that the power of prayer resides in the person praying. That is a lie. As Peter corrected the people in Acts chapter three.

Don't think that by our own power or godliness that we could do these things that this lame man walks. No, it's the power of the reigning Christ.

No, prayer is just the acknowledgement of our weakness, not our strength, our weakness before the omnipotent who then exerts his power on our behalf.

[13 : 15] prayer is powerful and effective because the God who answers, hears and answers, is powerful and effective. But having said that, let me also go on to say, as our text does, that not everyone's prayer is powerful and effective.

No, notice it says the prayer of a righteous man. A righteous person is powerful and effective. Now, a righteous person is one who is right with God.

That means that God standing in the place of judgment with all of his holy laws looks at the individual and says, there is nothing against him here.

He's right with me. That's the righteous man. He's in a right standing with this God. And we don't get into a right standing with God by trying to be good, trying to be better.

No, we get into a right standing with God through faith. We trust in his Savior. And Jesus takes all of our sins and he gives us all of his righteous merits.

[14 : 33] So that if you look in the record books in heaven, you will find beside my name all the righteousness of Jesus. And you say, where are his sins?

I know he sinned. He sinned against me. He said things to me. He said things about me. Where are John's sins? And you won't find them there because Jesus has taken them away and died for them, shed his own blood to forgive them.

They're gone and in their place has been put the righteousness of Jesus. I'm a righteous man accepted by God for the righteousness of Jesus.

But any righteous man who's accepted by God is also being made righteous in this life because the faith that he has in that Savior is a working faith.

Is that not what James has been saying? It's a real faith. It's a faith that produces works. So yes, you will see that the righteous man is not only one whom God has counted righteous legally in heaven, but he's also a righteous man who in this life is not going his own way, but is obeying the righteous laws of Jesus.

[15:49] He's living according to God's righteous will. Indeed, John tells us in 1 John 3:7, Dear children, do not let anyone lead you astray.

He who does what is right is righteous, just as he is righteous. Who is the righteous man? He's one who has placed saving faith in Jesus and so has been counted righteous for Jesus' sake.

And because that faith in Jesus is real, he is one who does what is righteous by the power of Jesus Spirit living in him. And they are the ones whose prayers are powerful and effective.

Indeed, the psalmist knew that if he had regarded and cherished sin in his heart that the Lord would not have heard him. That his prayer would have had no reaching power into heaven.

But he says, but my prayer has been answered. It doesn't say that if you're not perfect, your prayers don't make it to heaven. It says if you cherish sin in your heart, if you just cuddle it and coddle it and keep it with love in your heart, I'm not going to get rid of this sin.

[17:00] Then don't expect your prayers to be powerful and effective. David knew it in the old covenant. Isaiah knew it. The reason your prayers aren't being answered, he told the people of God, is not because God's arm is too short to save or his ear is too dull to hear, but your iniquities, your sins have come between you and God so that he will not hear you.

He won't answer your prayers. So repent and get the separating thing between you and God out of the way, that love of sin.

Bring your sin to Jesus and confess it and ask him to save you from it. And you will pray powerful and effective prayers because God who is powerful and effective will hear an answer.

The Lord is far from the wicked, but he hears the prayers of the righteous. Proverbs 15, 29. Peter says as much, for the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are open to their prayers.

The righteous have the ear of God. So get their prayers for you. Go to them and ask them to pray for you. You want the prayers of a righteous man.

[18:15] You be such a one yourself so that when you pray, your prayers are righteous, are powerful and effective because the righteous man when he prays, prays through the righteousness of Jesus and their prayers are acceptable for Jesus' sake.

So are you doing that? Are you praying as one who's righteous, but also soliciting the prayers of others who are righteous? Do you come on Wednesday nights and ask for the prayers of the righteous as they gather to pray?

We've been seeing God answer week after week as we've asked him and he for Jesus' sake has been pleased to answer us.

Pray, pray, pray in your closet, pray in your homes, pray in your car, pray in the sanctuary of the church, pray in the foyer in the parking lot of the church as you fellowship with each other.

Prayer matter comes up. Pray, brothers, pray in the church as a righteous man is powerful and effective. So the power of prayer has been stated.

[19:36] James doesn't leave it there, but as every good preacher, he wants to illustrate it. I want to show you this in the life of a real man. He wasn't a perfect man. He's a righteous man, and let me pick out one from the Old Testament.

So we have secondly, the power of prayer illustrated. Elijah, verse 17, Elijah was a man just like us. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years. Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops. 2,800 years ago, there lived a man named Elijah, over in Israel.

Elijah. And James tells us two important things that we need to know about him. First off, he wants us to know that he was just an ordinary man.

He was just an ordinary man. Elijah was a man just like us. Now as soon as the listener heard James, or someone reading the letter from James, mentioned the word Elijah, immediately their thoughts soared.

[20:46] perhaps like a bunch of baseball enthusiasts would soar if someone mentioned Babe Ruth or Ted Williams, and wow, Elijah, he enjoyed a high reputation in Israel.

After all, he had called down fire from heaven on Mount Carmel, hadn't he? He had raised the dead boy to life by prayer. He never died, but went to heaven amid chariots of fire.

He was the prophet that was used by God to turn the hearts of the people who had backslidden back to the Lord. He's mentioned 30 times in the New Testament.

And yes, he was one of those on the Mount of Transfiguration that appeared to talk with Jesus about his coming Exodus. Yes, Moses was there as the representative of the law, and there was

Elijah as the representative of the prophets.

Here's the granddaddy of all prophets. He's anything but an ordinary man in that sense, they might think.

[22:00] The average Joe Christian held Elijah so high that he couldn't even relate to him. He was out of reach. And as long as that was the case, James knows that his illustration of the power of prayer will fall short.

He's wasting his words on these people. It will be of no avail to them. They'll just write it off and say, oh, yes, but that was Elijah. And perhaps some of you are doing the same. Prayer is powerful and effective.

Let me tell you about a man named Elijah. Oh, yes, but he was a prophet. Come on. Or he was something special. Well, to think such is to be wrong.

Yes, he was more than yes, he was a prophet. I'm not saying there were no differences, but if you by that just dismiss what James says, you are wrong and you have missed the whole point of verses 17 and 18.

The whole reason why he brings Elijah up is not for us to sit here and just go on and go about a man who had a powerful prayer life. No, he's bringing it up that we might pray and be encouraged at the possibilities of prayer by pointing us to Elijah and his prayer life.

[23:18] So the first thing James wants us to know is that Elijah was an ordinary man. He says he was a man just like us, a man of like passions as we are, made of the same stuff, same dust, same weaknesses of fallen human nature.

And indeed that's the Elijah we meet in the pages of first Kings. He gets hungry, he gets thirsty, he's no angelic being, he's a man, a real man.

And he got tired and he got weary just like us. And he got disappointed and depressed and he got scared and ran for his life.

Like some of us, Friday night or early Saturday morning with just one blast of thunder from the skies, we got scared. Elijah was a man just like us.

He was running scared from Jezebel. So that's the first point. He's an ordinary man. Next, James wants us to know that though he was an ordinary man, number two, he did extraordinary things through prayer.

[24:41] Extraordinary things like a three and a half year drought that started by his prayer and ended through his prayer.

For it says he prayed earnestly that it would not rain. And it did not rain on the land for three and a half years. Some of you have prayed that it would not rain on your parade or on your picnic for a Saturday afternoon.

Elijah's praying that it would not rain for three and a half years and it didn't. Now the Old Testament doesn't say anything at all about his prayers to stop the rain that is.

Just that he announced to King Ahab, quote, there will be neither dew nor rain in the next few years except at my word. First King 17 1. But here in James we have fresh light, something we weren't told in the Old Testament.

And that is that that that came about by earnest prayer. That Elijah prayed earnestly. joy. And that's why it stopped raining.

[25:54] He prayed. And when he prayed, God listened and turned off the water three and a half years with no rain. That's pretty amazing.

That's anything but ordinary. But there's more. For he prayed again and the heavens gave rain and the earth produced its crops.

kids, which is easier to turn off the rain for three and a half years or to start it up again as after it has not rained for three and a half years?

Well, you say they're both impossible to man and that's precisely the reason James brings up this illustration. Because Elijah prayed again and his prayer reached the arm of omnipotence that took hold of the spigots of heaven and turned them back on again after three and a half years.

Both are impossible to man. They were impossible to Elijah and yet he did both of them through prayer. Now we're given some further information in the Old Testament about this prayer.

[27:08] First Kings 18. One that was read for you says that the word of the Lord came to Elijah. Go and present yourself to Ahab and I will send rain on the land.

This is into the third year of the drought. Now the word of the Lord comes to Elijah and says go tell Ahab I'm bringing rain and I will bring the rain.

And so on the basis of this word of God he prayed for rain. Say that's kind of like praying the promises isn't it.

God gave him a promise. You go appear before Ahab and I will send the rain. So Elijah is praying for rain. That God had promised to send and that's how we're to pray.

We're to find promises in the word of God and we're to pray them. God you said you would do this. Now keep your word. Do what you've said. Don't let your word fall to the ground unfulfilled.

[28:19] Now you must understand that in the covenant that God made with the nation of Israel there were very clear provisions concerning rain in the promised land where they lived.

Found in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28 rain figured in to the blessings and cursings of the covenant. For instance Leviticus 26 3 and 4 if you follow my decrees and are careful to obey my commands I will send you rain in its season and the ground will yield its crops and the trees of the field their fruit.

Deuteronomy 28 12 the Lord will open the heavens the storehouse of his bounty to send rain on your land and seasons in season to bless all the work of your hands.

Rain was a covenant blessing for covenant faithfulness. But if they turned away from the Lord and no longer kept his decrees, one of the curses of the covenant would be the withholding of rain.

Leviticus 26 18 and 19 if after all this you will not listen to me, I will punish you for your sins seven times over. I will break down your stubborn pride and make the sky above you like iron and the ground beneath you like bronze.

[29:44] Your strength will be spent in vain because your soil will not yield its crops nor will the trees of the land yield their fruit. Deuteronomy 28 the Lord will strike you with wasting disease with fever and inflammation with scorching heat and drought drought.

The Lord will turn the rain of your country into dust and powder. It will come down from the skies until you are destroyed. So you see this whole matter of praying for the rain to start and to stop and all of this was not just a random prayer of Elijah.

I just think I'll pray for no rain or I think I'll pray for rain. Elijah knew God's word that promised rain or promised the lack of it as a part of the covenant blessings and cursings.

And when Israel turned their back on God and worshiped other gods and when the prophets of Baal and Asherah were government funded prophets of Jezebel and the people's hearts were turned away from the Lord, Elijah prayed for the rain to stop according to his word.

And on Mount Carmel, Elijah is just seeing the people beginning to return to the Lord and see the fault. He's seen the false prophets killed. So he prays for the promised rain as the promised blessing of the covenant.

[31:14] covenant. Our prayers too are to be in accordance to God's word. When you pray, do you pray the word of God? Jesus said, if you remain in me and my words remain in you, you may ask whatever you wish and it will be done for you.

When my words remain in you, you will be praying according to my will, my wishes, what I have promised, what I have said. Here's the warrant of his prayer, the justification of his praying.

And in this passage, when he prays for the rain to be turned back on, we're told specifically that the Lord promised that he would send rain. He's praying the promise. And then we see something of the earnestness of his praying for the rains to come back after that showdown on Mount Sinai that was read for us.

The prophets of Baal and Asherah led away to the slaughter. He announced to King Ahab, go eat and drink for there is the sound of a heavy rain. Now, remember, it hasn't rained for three and a half years.

Get your rain duds on, Ahab, because it's going to be a heavy rain. And while Ahab ate and drank, Elijah climbed to the top of Carmel, bent down to the ground and put his face between his knees.

[32:33] Folks, he's praying. He's praying. That is the posture of humble, absolute, utter dependence upon God. He gets low, real low, before God.

And he's praying. And he's asking God to do what he had promised and to send rain on the land.

And as he's praying, he doesn't even bother to get up and check the sky.

He sends a servant to go to a higher point and there to look out over the western sky, over the Mediterranean Sea. For that was the way that God brought rain to Palestine.

So the clouds would develop from the water that evaporated up over the Mediterranean Sea and would come and dump it upon the land of Palestine. Go look. So the servant goes and he looks. And he comes back. And he says, there's nothing there. There's nothing there, Elijah.

[33 : 41] There's no indication whatever that your prayer has even been heard, much less that it has been answered. The situation is still as dry and desperate as ever.

Your asking has not been effective. It has not accomplished anything. Oh, but hold on. Elijah's not done praying. And he prays on.

He has a word from God that it's going to rain. And he's expecting rain. Go look again. Are you sure you don't see any? Go look again.

He goes and looks and comes back. There's nothing there. There is nothing observable to the sight that God has even heard your prayer. And I know some of you are right there this morning and you've been praying that which is in accordance with God's will and you don't see it and nobody else can see it.

And you're being tempted to quit praying. And Elijah just kept praying. He's got a promise and he's not going to let go of it. Do you have a promise? Then don't let go of it.

[34 : 46] Seven times Elijah said, go back. And it wasn't until the seventh time that the servant reported a cloud as small as a man's hand. That's what it looked like in perspective.

It's just about that big. Was arising over the sea. Elijah knew at once that was his answer from God. He said, go tell Ahab, hitch up your chariot and go down before the rain stops you. And meanwhile, the skies grew black with clouds. The wind rose and a heavy rain came down.

And Ahab rode off to Jezreel. Now James is telling us that if we come away from this story saying, wow, that Elijah is really something that we've missed the point.

We've missed the point. Elijah was a man just like we are. And yet, through prayer, he accomplished things that were, well, let's just say extraordinary.

[35 : 52] Let's say supernatural. Let's say beyond what man can do. That's the point. Extraordinary things are done through the prayers of an ordinary man laying hold of an extraordinary God.

The prayers of a righteous man are powerful and effective because they lay hold of a very extraordinary God. The living and true God. He who is God alone. The God who is almighty.

What is the power needed to shut down the waterworks of the sky for three and a half years and then to turn it on again? When Job speaks of the great and unsearchable wonders that God performs, he right away speaks of rain.

Job 5.10, he gives rain on the earth and sends water on the fields and you and I may not think that's a big deal. Job thought it was and anybody who studies it a little while will see just what a big deal that is.

Wow, what strength, what power that God sends rain. John Piper explains many amazing things about rain in his book, The God Word Life, part two.

[37 : 03] And he says, if just one inch of rain falls overnight on one square mile of field, it's over 206 million gallons of water and it weighs over one and a half billion pounds.

Now that is a lot of weight to push around. It's a lot of weight to lift up off of the face of the earth by way of evaporation. You heard that word, kids?

That's just another word for God's lifting power. And he lifts that one and a half billion pounds up in the air. He brings it right over your house, your field.

And then he drops it. But not all at once where it smashes us and smashed the fields and the tender crops. And so he drops it slowly.

He lets it drizzle and come down and refresh the earth. condensation so that it drops down in little portions.

[38 : 09] You've heard the word condensation? That's just God's power to hold this one and a half billion pound jug of water and to let it down drop by drop. this is the power of God in sending rain.

To turn it off and then to turn it back on again is clearly beyond Elijah's capacity. But prayer reaches the hand that controls the entire weather of the planet and so the very elements of nature yield to Elijah's prayer.

prayer. So the message of James is this. Don't think of Elijah when I give him as an example of prayer. Don't you go thinking of him as something special.

He was just like us. Are you a righteous man for the blood of Jesus? So was he. And he did extraordinary things through praying to an extraordinary God and so can you.

Things that are impossible. Things that only God can do. I suggest that's the same lesson in Hebrews chapter 11 with the Hall of Faith. And you read of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and Joseph and David and Moses and Noah and Enoch and all these greats of the Hall of Fame. [39:22] And we sometimes think, wow. They were just like you, Christian. Just like you. Read all that's said about them. You'll see that. But they had faith in an extraordinary God who had spoken a word to them and they believe the word of God and amazing things happen.

So it is here with prayer. Let's come then to the third major point. The power of prayer has been stated. It's been illustrated. Let's seek to apply it and we'll be done.

Well, prayer is hard work. Prayer is spiritual work and every bit of your flesh crawls when you set yourself to pray. And it would rather do anything but pray.

Thomas Shepard, the Puritan who helped start Harvard University back when its purpose was to train ministers of the gospel, said there are days when I'd rather die than pray.

You've known those days. You've known those times. You just set yourself to pray and you'll find a thousand other things to do. Hindrances to keep us from coming to prayer. What is big enough and powerful enough to overcome all these excuses and all these hindrances that come between us and prayer?

[40:43] Just this, the power of prayer. Let a man or woman, boy or girl be convinced of the power of prayer and they will make their way through all the obstacles and hindrances to pray because they know that if I lay hold of God, unusual things will happen.

Supernatural, things will happen. Things that I can't do will happen. What various hindrances we meet in coming to the mercy seat. Yet he who knows the worth of prayer but often seeks to be found there.

We've met those hindrances to prayer. Here's the remedy to all of our backwardness to prayer, that the prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective. Why does he tell us that?

Why does James and God the Holy Spirit tell us that if not to encourage us to pray, if not for us to seek the prayers of other righteous men and women on our behalf? And secondly, why does he give us this particular illustration of prayer started stopping and starting the rain unless it is for this purpose to encourage us to pray for things that are impossible to men?

To pray for things that only God can do. Because what is impossible to man is possible with prayer.

[42:09] Witness Elijah. And James knows that this is the kind of power that we will need in the pursuit of holiness, in the battle with sin, in obeying any one of the 50 commands he's just issued in this letter, you're going to need supernatural, above your own ability, power to obey.

And that's what God gives in answer to the prayer of a righteous, ordinary man. So nobody get off the hook this morning.

Oh, that's Elijah. No, for you. For you. For you. You know, I don't believe we've been to the end of any passage of scripture until we've asked the question, what does this teach us about God?

Sometimes the focus is so upon us and what we're supposed to do that we don't answer that question, and that's not good. I need to do that more often, but let's just ask that question once this morning.

What does this passage teach us about our God? Well, surely this, that he is glorified when we ask him to do things that are impossible to man.

[43:27] That God wants to be glorified in our prayers, and he is most glorified in our prayers when we ask him to do what only he can do. So what impossible things are you asking God to do?

We'll start right where we're at, the end of James. We've just been through this book. Go back and pray your way through the book of James and turn every one of those 50 commands into a prayer.

Oh, Lord, would you help me right now to count this trial pure joy? Because I know that you are working good for me in it.

Oh, God, will you help me to love this person in my life as much as I love myself? And you go back through and you pray.

These are impossible things, folks, and they're the kinds of impossible things that James means for us to start praying. That's where you all ought to be starting, I would say, when we ask what impossible things are you asking?

[44:33] I believe the context of the verses is the whole book of James, and he's saying, start praying, brothers. Lord, help me to keep a tight rein on my tongue in this confrontational meeting.

And so on. You say they're impossible. So is stopping rain for three and a half years. And Elijah did it when he prayed. Now, this has been James goal all along in this letter to hold high God's standard of holiness.

Oh, it's so high. Well, of course, it's God. God is high and lofty and holy. And James refuses to do what what preachers in our day are doing. That's to lower the standard down here where it's manageable.

I can do that. I can handle this. James says, no. The standard is God's own holiness. He is righteous. That's what you're called to do and to be like God.

And we say, oh, how can we? How can we ever love another person like we love ourselves? And it sends us running to the throne of grace where we find grace.

[45 : 49] Where we find help. He wants us to come in our weakness to him who is strong and so to find in him all the power and all the wisdom and all the grace that we need to live a life of godliness in this present evil world.

So it's fitting, isn't it, that at the very end of the book of James, that he brings us right back to the throne of grace and he leaves us there. That's where you belong. If you if you've understood anything, I've said Christian.

That's what he said. Pray. Get your elders to pray. Get your brothers and sisters to pray. Pray, pray, pray. Because the prayer of a righteous man is powerful and it's effective.

If. Bring your impossible things to God. Are you praying for any unconverted people to be saved?

Oh. Yeah, but she is so impossible. So is stopping rain for three and a half years. Then pray.

[46 : 59] Pray for her. What are we praying when we pray for the salvation of a person? We're praying that a heart of stone would begin to beat. Can you do that?

Can your preacher do that? Your Sunday school teacher, you dads and moms, can you do that with your children? To make a heart that loves sin and self to to start to love Jesus and his laws and commands.

A heart that loves to roam and go its own way to to repudiate self and self sway and to run in the ways of God's commands. Can you do that?

No, only God can do it. So pray. Ask him for that. That glorifies him when you ask him to save a sinner. A Puritan pastor went past the blacksmith shop and he saw his new dog.

He's chained there to the leg of the anvil. Bang! Goes the hammer against the hot metal and sparks are flying. And that poor dog is jerking at the end of his chain, barking and yelping, going mad.

[48 : 09] And the Puritan pastor came by the same blacksmith shop a month later. Bang! Bang! Goes the hammer, flying sparks everywhere.

And he's sleeping. What happened? He got used to it. Got used to the hammer banging, the sparks flying.

It just became part of the background noise in his life. And now he's sleeping while the hammer's pounding. I know some sinners that are like that, who when they first heard the gospel, became alarmed about their lost condition.

Became concerned about finding salvation in the only person where it's found in Jesus Christ. I must have Christ. But they did nothing about it.

They said tomorrow I will do something about it, but not today. Well, it's tomorrow now. And let's look at them now. They're sleeping under the preaching of God's word, if they're even hearing God's word anymore, because they've all heard it so long and it's just background noise and they do not have ears that hear.

[49 : 31] And God is a is a million miles away in their consciousness, even while the preacher speaks the word of God. God. And I have known prayer to an almighty sovereign God to wake up such sinners.

And to make Christ and forgiveness of sins the one thing needful in their life so that nothing else in the universe matters. I must be saved.

That's our God. Pray to him. Ask him to do what only God can do to save our lost children, to save our lost neighbors, to save the most stubborn and hard hearted sinner.

By the way, sinner. If you're not one of Christ's righteous ones, there is one prayer that will stop him. It's the cry for mercy.

There is one prayer for you, the unrighteous that he will hear. Is God be merciful to me, a sinner?

There was that blind man and Jesus was passing by and he cried, Jesus, son of David, have mercy

on me.

[50:49] And it stopped Jesus in his tracks. Here's a man who's crying out for mercy. Bring him. What would you have me to do? He says. You're lost this morning.

I'm not a prayer of a righteous man. Here's a prayer. He will not turn away. Whoever comes to me, I will in no eyes cast out. Cast yourself on his mercy and be saved.

And he'll save you. Yes, we should be praying for the conversion of others. We should be praying about struggles with sin that keep getting the upper hand on us, that we do not have power in ourselves to break.

Problems in relationships gone sour, the fight, the fighting and quarreling that James talks about in James chapter four that only gets worse. Impossible. You say, yes, they are. And so is starting rain after three and a half years of drought and sufferings that have left you worn out and weary and emotionally spent and mentally and physically exhausted, spiritually on empty.

And you can no more renew your own strength and restore your vital relationship with Christ than you can lift yourself up by pulling on your shoestrings. But God can and he lifts up.

[52:04] Restores and forgives and heals in answer to prayer. I say, is there not a special suitedness to this particular illustration then that James picks?

He picks Elijah and his stopping and starting the rain. Think of it this way. What a change the refreshing rain made upon the landscape of Israel.

Praise for no rain and it stops raining. You know, things get pretty dark and dry around here with three and a half weeks without rain, don't they?

And some of you got to start turning on your sprinklers and because flowers wilt and plants start shriveling and the grass turns brown. But this is three and a half years.

Can you imagine how brown the landscape was? Nothing grew. It's all dust. There's no fruitfulness.

[53:07] There was desolation and death. People were dying. You remember Elijah went to stay with that widow of Zarephath? What was she doing when he met him? Gathering sticks to make the last fire to cook the last bit of food that she had before she and her son died.

Yes, it was desperate times. Drought, brown, parched earth. And then he prayed again and the rains came and the whole landscape changed.

The brown turned green. The fields started to produce crops. There was plenteous food. There was life where there had been death.

Could it be that James selects this picture of prayer? Because the context in which he's writing is about those who are weak and weary.

They have no strength of their own. They've lost their fruitfulness and their vitality. And he says, if you pray, you ask others to pray.

[54:19] The same God that turned on the water for Elijah and turned the brown desert into a fertile field will do the same with your heart. And that parched heart of yours, it's all cracked and and withered and weak and unable to produce fruit.

It will become a well-watered garden where the fruit of the spirit of Jesus is being reproduced in your life to the glory of God. So pray and get a righteous brother or sister to pray with you.

Oh, for a refreshing rain from heaven. Is that your heart's desire this morning? Jesus loves to answer prayer. Jesus loves to refresh his people.

That's the message that James is telling. So go to him, ask him, seek him.