

PRAYER 201
Why Believe?

INTRO: Our question this morning is this: Why does God require us to believe when we pray? Last year I gave two messages on the subject of why pray? Why does God require us to pray to receive things from Him? Those messages are available on sermonaudio if you wish to listen to them. They were called, Prayer 101: Why Pray? Our subject this morning is, Prayer 201: Why Believe? Why does God require of us to believe in order to receive answers to our prayers?

In the last few years I have read quite a lot about the persecution of Christians. Before persecuted Christians are executed they are almost always given the chance to recant. Sometimes, if they would only give a little sacrifice to some false god, their life would be spared. What is so important about what you believe? Why are Christians set free if they deny their Christian faith? You see, by recanting Christians denounce their faith. I ask you, what is it that is so huge about what people believe? Why does the Bible say, "For God so loved the world, that whosoever believes..." Why is believing so very important? Why is believing important in prayer?

Last fall I gave two messages on this subject: 'Why Pray?' We know we ought to pray, and yet most of us will readily admit that we pray very little. Jesus said in Luke 6:46, "But why do you call Me 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do the things which I say?" How can a person call Jesus Lord and live in disobedience to Him? How can He be our Lord if that is true of us? He is not Lord when we live in disobedience to Him. But how can we say we believe in prayer and prayer plays such a small role in our life? In the Scriptures Christians are clearly instructed to pray, and to pray much. Listen to Paul, "...praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints..." Listen to these words of Luke 18:1, "Then He (that is Jesus) spoke a parable to them, that men ought always to pray and not to lose heart..." Men 'ought'. We are obligated to pray. We owe it to God to pray.

But do we pray? Well, yes, maybe a few minutes in the morning. Maybe. And then, of course, we do pray before meals. And when we do pray before meals, it is maybe 30-45

seconds. But what of the rest of the day? And yet we say we believe in prayer. Listen to Mark 1:35 which speaks of Jesus. It says, "Now in the morning, having risen a long while before daylight, He went out and departed to a solitary place; and there He prayed." This is the Creator of the universe! He needed to pray? That is a message for us! That is a message for me!

And now, this morning I want to leave the question, "Why Pray?" and go on to the question, "Why do we need to pray in faith? Many books on prayer speak of the importance of faith in prayer but no books I have, give a reason 'why' faith needs to be exercised before God will answer our prayers. I don't even know if any of those books sought to answer the question, why does God require of us to pray? And so, the purpose of this message this morning is an attempt to answer this question, why does God require of us to believe when we pray?

The reason I speak of prayer at this time is that very shortly our Wednesday Night Prayer Meeting will begin again. This is a reminder and an encouragement for you to consider to join the Wednesday prayer meeting. The prayer meeting is one of the most important aspects of church life. I am not talking about personal prayer, although that is very important as well. I am talking about united prayer. We read of the early Church, just after it was born in Acts 2, about their church life. And it says this, "And they continued steadfastly in the apostles doctrine." There is the preaching and teaching ministry of the church. They continued steadfastly in fellowship. That is meeting and interacting one with another on spiritual matters. This is most closely represented in the church today in Sunday School. Consider, and think through what united fellowship is. Then the early church met together for communion, the breaking of bread. And last, they met together for united prayer. This is where warfare is waged and I encourage you to consider putting on all the armor of God and coming to prayer meeting.

I was sent a little report some time ago that claimed there were terrorist groups operating in many churches. Here is what the report said, "Latest news reports are that five terrorist cell groups have been operating in many of our churches. They have been identified as: Bin Sleepin, Bin Arguin, Bin Fightin, Bin Complainin, and Bin Missin." Later, this report went on to speak of a small cell group

set out to counterattack terrorism in the church. Here is what it said, "However, there have been reports of a sixth group. A tiny cell known by the name Bin Prayin is actually the only effective counter terrorism force in the church. Unlike other terrorist cells, the Bin Prayin team does not blend in with whoever and whatever comes along. Bin Prayin does whatever is needed to uplift and encourage the Body of Christ. We have noticed that the Bin Prayin cell group has different characteristics than the others. They have Bin Watchin, Bin Waitin, Bin Fastin, and Bin Longin for their Master, Jesus Christ to return."

Might I encourage you to ask yourself this question this morning, "What keeps me from the prayer meeting?"

I. VIEWED FROM GOD'S PERSPECTIVE

A. Because of God's glory

Well, we want to begin our subject of the question, why does God require faith, in order to answer our prayers? Why must we believe? Let me give you as our first point that God requires us to believe Him before He answers our prayers because in this way He gets the glory. As a passage for this point, we go to Mark 11 (read 20-24). Now I think it is correct to say that an answer to prayer is a miracle. It is a miracle because natural laws are set aside in order to do what has been requested. God may use natural processes to answer our prayers, but when He does so because we have prayed, it is a miracle. We see that in our passage. The day earlier, Jesus had cursed the fig tree mentioned in this passage. It did not wither up and die right there before their eyes. The life-giving juices that flowed in this tree by nature stopped the moment Jesus cursed it. By the next day the leaves had withered away. It was an unnatural death. It was a premature death. Nature had been set aside to answer Jesus' prayer. That is a miracle.

So the disciples said, "Rabbi, look! The fig tree which You cursed has withered away!" And Jesus said, "Have faith in God." And then He told them that if they would say to a mountain, "Be removed and cast into the sea", and if they would not doubt in their hearts, but believe, then their request would come to pass. So He said, "Therefore I say to you, whatever

things you ask, when you pray, believe that you receive them, and you will have them."

I would propose to you first of all that when God answers our prayers, He must do it in such a way that He gets the glory. It seems to me that the reason we must believe when we pray is not different from the reason we must believe in order to be saved. So, consider for a moment why we must believe in order to be saved. In Christ, God paid the penalty for all man's sins. But to appropriate that salvation, man must do two things. He must repent and he must believe. And we might ask, since God paid for all man's sins, could He not save all man whether man believes or not? And I answer that He could not do that. And the natural question is, why not? And the answer is that He would have ceased to be just. Romans 3:23-26 makes it clear that God must remain just when He justifies sinners.

So we ask, why must man believe to appropriate salvation, and this is what I believe the answer to that question is: Man must believe because in order to believe, I, the sinner, must come into agreement with God that I am wrong and He is right. When I believe God, I agree with Him that I am a wicked sinner and He is a just and loving and wonderful God. When I sin I have chosen to follow the devil's will. The word *sin* means to miss the mark. And the mark it misses is the perfect will and character of God! By sinning, I have chosen to follow the devil's will. That is why Romans 3:23 says all have sinned and thus come short of the glory of God. By sinning I choose to follow the will of the devil, not God's will. When I repent, I choose to turn away from the devil. When I believe God, I turn towards God and I choose God's will, and thus hit the mark of His perfect will and character! I cannot actively trust God in a matter that is a sin for me to do. And when I believe God is right and I am wrong, I will deny myself and choose to do His will. It is this which glorifies Him. This is the very reason He created man. So, in order to be saved, I must believe Him and choose the will of God.

In repenting, I actively turn away from sin. In believing God, I actively turn and choose God's way. He is my choice. I surrender my will to His my will.

In sinning, the devil is my choice. His will is my will in that matter. When I sin, the devil has right to me through my sin. But when I believe God, then God has right to me through my faith and obedience to Him. What is so crucial about faith is that it requires that I choose to surrender my will, and choose that which is in line with God Almighty. Only in this way can I trust Him. In trusting Him I give my heart to Him. This is what He wants. This is what glorifies Him and that is why He made me. When I believe Him, I have come back to that for which He made me, and He is just in justifying me. When I trust Him, and He justifies me, it is a demonstration of His righteousness. The believing that is required in the Bible is present tense believing. The justification that is spoken of in Romans is not a once for all justification, but is also an ongoing, present tense justifying, as we go on trusting Him.

So, with that I ask why must we have faith when we pray? Again, I am convinced in order for God to be glorified in us, we must not only pray, but we must also believe. The first prerequisite to receiving things from God is that we pray. The second, is that we must also believe. Why is that so? Now think about that for a moment with me. Let us say all God required was for us to ask. Let us say He did not require faith on our part. Any unbeliever could do that. Any sinning, carnal Christian could do that. Now let us say an unbeliever or a carnal Christian asked God for a car and presto, there is a car. Would God be glorified? No. It would be disastrous. And so if God is to be glorified through prayer, He must make things available to us through prayer in such a way that He gets the glory. And so I believe one of the reasons God requires us to believe Him for things before we receive them is because only in this way He will get the glory. You see, the Scripture says that without faith it is impossible to please God.

B. Because of God's Righteousness

I would give as a second reason why God requires us to believe when we pray is because His righteousness requires it. So let me ask of you this question: If God would answer our prayers simply because we asked, with no faith required, what would happen? Let me

answer that by something we understand. Let me put it in the form of a question: What happens to children who get everything they ask for with no further requirements? You do not have to look far in our affluent society to answer that question. So, let me ask this question: Is it morally right for parents to give their children everything they ask for without any further requirements? Well, the answer to that is simple. It is not right to ruin a child like that.

So, if God would make anything available to an unbeliever if he only asked, that unbeliever would never get saved. That is certain, and that would be wrong. But if God only required of believers to ask, with no further requirements, they would end up ruined as well. If God only required of us to ask, His righteousness would fail, and He would cease to be just and cease to be good and cease to be God.

Now you see, God can justify, that is declare righteous, the most ungodly sinner, if that sinner will repent and believe the Gospel. And God remains just in justifying this sinner because of the repentance and faith. But how can God remain just in giving to His children those things they desire, and remain just while He gives them those things? How? By requiring them to believe Him. You see, when God initially justifies us, He remains just in doing so because through our faith He changes us. Just so, when we want to pray in faith, we are changed by it.

Would God be righteous if He saved us and then let us live in sin? No! His justice or righteousness would be in question. We are to be sanctified by faith, and this is also how we are changed. And so, when we pray to receive things, God requires that we must believe Him before He gives us that which we ask for. Turn with me to Mark 11 (read vs. 24). Here we are told clearly that God requires us to believe when we pray. So why does He require us to believe before we receive? It is this faith that justifies Him, or it makes Him righteous in answering our prayers!

C. Because of God's Will

I want to give a third reason why I think God requires us to exercise faith when we pray, and that is because of His will. I would give 1 John 5:14 as a text for this topic. John writes like this: "Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us."

I would venture to say that right here is the crux of why so many of our prayers are not answered. Some time ago my son-in-law and I discussed the problem of unanswered prayer. Why was it that when we prayed for rain, it did not happen? I pondered that and thought I might preach this year on, and I borrow this phrase from Richard Wurmbrandt, *the enigma of unanswered prayer*. I would probably have done that if it had not been for a certain lady in this church. Last year when I preached on "Why Pray?" and mentioned that this year I planned to speak on "Why Believe?" she wanted me to do that last year already. But I was not ready. Just a few Sundays ago she reminded me of this and I said I had thought I might preach on the enigma of unanswered prayer, but she held me to my promise.

Why does God require believing prayer? You see, we are talking here about faith, but not just any faith. We are talking about faith in the God of the Bible (Mk. 11:22). And a true Biblical faith is grounded in knowing God and His Word. And when we know God and His word, the faith that springs from that knowledge will cause us to choose God's will above ours. And many times when we choose His will above ours, our wills start to come into line with His will. It is this that glorifies God. It is also this that teaches us to pray in faith. So it seems to me that true faith will first cause us to come into agreement with God's will. May I suggest to you that many of our prayers are not answered because we do not will what God wills? I might go further and say that many times we do not even know the will of God.

Let me give you an example. The Bible says whom the Lord loves He chastens. So let us say God allows some sickness to befall a Christian in order that God might get that Christian's attention and get them back on track. And then, all over God's people are praying for healing, and God says, I don't want this person healed yet. I have allowed this for a purpose. But we, entirely ignorant of His will, plead for

healing. How many times do we pray or seek to understand the will of God in a certain matter?

And how will we learn the will of God? Well, we will not learn it until we learn to know God in depth. Until then, we will cry for healing. I want to recommend to you that mostly we do not know how to pray because we have no idea of God's will in the matter. And I recommend to you that the moment our wills are in line with His and we know Him deeply, He all but jumps to answer our prayers! But oh, how different our prayers have then become! You see, when it is God's will not to heal until that person learns from God what God wants him or her to learn, then we would do well to say, "Lord, if you are trying to gain this person's attention, then I pray that this sickness will cause this person to become soft towards You and hungry and thirsty for truth." You see, when God's will is accomplished and we have prayed in line with His will, then He is glorified!

And so I ask, why did the fig tree wither when Jesus prayed in Mark 11? And you and I, when we pray for a mountain to be removed and we wake up in the morning and we say, "Just what I thought, it's still there", why was it not moved? What is the difference between our prayer to have the mountain moved and Jesus' cursing of the fig tree?

May I recommend to you that when Jesus cursed the fig tree, He believed it would happen because He knew it was God's will. And God, by causing the fig tree to die, gave a prophetic picture of Israel by it. It was His will. Jesus' will was in line with His Father's will. He did not ask God to curse a fig tree for Him every day. As a matter of fact, this is the only time He did so. It was the right time and the right place. It was God's will.

But before you and I pray for a mountain to be moved, we must first ascertain God's will. If we are praying out of God's will for our own glory, God is under no obligation to answer our prayers. Sometimes when we pray for healing, God is under no obligation to do so. It is not even His will. So before we ask God to move mountains, it must be God's will as well. God must be glorified through that thing.

Now, what does it require to have such faith that removes mountains? It requires a deep knowledge of God's will through intimately knowing His Word and a consistent walk that pleases God. How could Jesus have cursed this fig tree, had He not known God's mind on the matter?

However, there are times when our will is in conflict with God's will. Or it may be that we want something but we do not know His will. And so we pray, as it were, to bring God's will in line with our will. And it may be that sometimes God answers our pleas in such times. At other times we may need to come to the point where we surrender to Him and say, "Nevertheless, not my will be done, but Yours." There are times when our wills conflict with God's will, and we wrestle in prayer. But God does not answer because He wants us to come to the place where we surrender to Him without knowing the outcome. He may even wish us to so surrender our wills to Him to such an extent that we would allow ourselves to be martyred. And in such times we pray in faith that He will do right, though it is contrary to our will. We have come to the point of surrendering to Him no matter what may be the outcome. Still, it may be a prayer of faith, because we are fully trusting God will do what is best. And thus we are changed from wanting our will above all else, to wanting His will above all else. And it is this faith in God that brings about such changes. Such are the reasons God requires faith in us in our prayer lives.

We can give an example of this from Gethsemane. So let us go there for a moment (Mark 14). Jesus is praying just before He is condemned to die. I want you to notice what He prays in verse 36 (read). He was praying that God would deliver Him from this cup. That was Jesus' will. That is what He wanted, and He wanted it desperately. So, because all things were possible for God, He requested if it might be possible for God to remove this cup from Him. But then He said, "...nevertheless, not what I will, but what You will." Though His will and God's will are in conflict, still He chooses to side with God against His own wishes.

From verse 37 we note that, seemingly from being worn out from the agony and intense prayer, He took a little break, only to find His disciples sleeping. But look now at verse 39 (read). In intense agony, Jesus once more seeks if there is not some way He might be delivered from this cup. That is His own will. But once more He says, "...nevertheless, not My will, but Thine be done."

Now I want you to go to Matthew 26 (read 44). Over and over He asked God to remove the cup from Him, but each time He said, "...nevertheless, not My will be done but Yours." And when all was said and done, God said, "My Son, My will is not Your will. My will is that you drink the cup and die. And now, My Son, my only Son, I ask You to drink it." And I ask, is not here the enigma of unanswered prayer? And yet, in hind sight we can see why. I wonder how many times we pray, but we do not see the larger picture. I wonder how many have left God and faith and prayer because God did not do what they wanted Him to do.

I ask you, what do you think John the Baptist prayed when he was in jail? Why do you think he sent his disciples to Jesus? Was it not that he wanted out of the jail? But in my own words, here is what God said, "John, my beloved prophet, your work is done. Come home, my son, come home. I have longed to have you in my presence and now your work is done. Come home son." But John did not know God's will in this matter. He wanted out of jail. And so, God allowed that wicked Herod to work his wicked work, and John went home to glory.

Now we pray many times when we do not know for certain what the will of God is. But, when we pray we need to keep God's will in mind. And the next time we ask God to remove a mountain, we might ask, Lord, is this Your will? It is mine, but is it Yours? Would it bring glory to You or to me if you answered this prayer? I believe one of the reasons God requires us to believe when we pray is because we need to know what will bring glory to Him. We need to know what He wants in order for Him to be glorified. So, those who can remove mountains by faith are those who have been deeply conformed to the image of Christ. They know

Him. They have walked with Him, and they know His mind.

And yet, even then, sometimes He wants for us to come to the very end of ourselves, and say, "Nevertheless, not my will be done, but Yours." And we can pray that in faith that God will do His will, because we know He is good, and we know His will is good. By requiring faith in prayer God accomplishes the great work of bringing us to want Him above all else. This is a very difficult task, but requiring faith helps accomplish it.

CONCL: So, as an effort to give us some idea why God requires faith when we pray, I have proposed several things. First, when we come to so trust God that we pray and believe, then God is glorified. By requiring faith in us, all our own selfish desires give way to His desires and then He is glorified.

And second, when we learn to trust God in prayer, then He can grant our requests and remain righteous in doing so. If God granted us our every request simply because we asked, we would soon be far from God. But when He requires us to believe Him, now we have to get to know Him and then He can safely give us the things we ask for.

And last, to learn to pray by faith we need to learn to know His will. Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God. Here we learn His will. And faith brings our wills in line with God's will, and when it doesn't it brings our choices in line with His will against our own will. Either way, we have learned to trust God. So before we become great men or women of prayer, we may first have to go through many testings and trials and thus we may come to know and desire God's will above all else. I believe our prayer lives are somewhat reflective of the depth to which we know God. When we know His will in big things, we have come to know God deeply. We have spent time with Him and know His Word and His will in many things. And when we want things for ourselves, even ever so desperately, we have learned that His will is best and we say by faith, "nevertheless, not my will be done but Yours."

