

Prayer 02 Promises Provoke Prayer

by Bob Clark

God's promises provoke prayer, and prayer is the means of bringing God's promises to reality.

Duration: 36:30

Scripture: Deuteronomy 33:23, Psalm 37:4, Isaiah 62:5-7, Ezekiel 36:23, Matthew 6:33, Philippians 4:19

Topics: "Prayer"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher discusses the story of Elijah and his encounter with King Ahab during a time of drought. Elijah receives a message from God to show himself to Ahab and promises that rain will come. Despite the lack of clouds, Elijah prays persistently for rain, showing God's affection and desire to bring rest to His people. The preacher emphasizes the importance of being persistent in prayer and not giving God any rest until He brings His time of blessing.

Transcript

Good evening. This is very nice for you to be out this evening, and I trust that God should speak to your heart through his word. You might remember that this morning we made a suggestion that prayer was the expression or the conversation of a human heart in conversation with God.

I'd like to add to that thought. Our idea was to express the thought that we come through experiences and pour our hearts out to God, and we sought to illustrate that through Hannah and that most remarkable, worshipful hymn or anthology of praise and prayer that she expressed in 1 Samuel 2. Now, this evening we'd like to expand on a little thought and carry just a little bit further, and the idea is that prayer also has another shade or another aspect to it. It's quite possible that when I was younger, I believed that prayer was primarily requesting and asking of God and looking for things, not selfishly, but I had a rather narrow perspective, and I would like to share with you the thought that it's quite possible that the word of God can illustrate for us a very special perspective about prayer, and that is that prayer is also the breathing out to God that which God has already spoken to us by his spirit.

And I would like to illustrate that from a number of places in the Old Testament, and then if you would just allow me just to introduce the thought so you can follow with my thinking, I'd like to give you a personal illustration. It was about this time of year, maybe 11 years ago, that God had for a number of years exercised Joyce, my wife, and my own heart concerning a sphere of service for the Lord. We were serving the Lord in one area of the country and had a concern that we might be directed of him to find a place that would maybe broaden our potential ministries or services.

We were in a very rural, small community. The Lord directed me to take a trip, and on that trip I was very much in prayer or very much concerned that we would find what it was that the Lord would have us to do, and I know that Joyce also was very concerned about that. And in this exercise of heart that I had, I was reading in my daily reading, just the regular reading through of the scriptures, and at the beginning of the week, at the time I was to leave, the morning that I was to leave on the plane, I read the blessing that Moses had extended to God's people, the nation of Israel, prior to their going into the land.

And there was a verse that stood out in my mind, and this was the verse. And of Naphtali he said, O Naphtali, satisfied with favor and full with the blessing of God, possess thou the west and the south. Now at that time we were living in the northeastern part of the country, and that directive kind of impressed itself upon me.

And traveling in the car up to the airport, and on that trip back I was musing and thinking, did that really mean it's so simple and so direct that God was affirming this? And when I deplaned, Joyce met me at the airport, and she had kind of a whimsical smile, or you know how some wives have that kind of a knowledgeable appearance about them? And I thought, what's happened now? What's going on? Because she had something in her mind I could tell. And I was kind of excited about sharing this verse with her. And I don't know whether it was right there at the airport, or whether we got into the automobile, the detail I can't remember.

But she told me that she had been reading in the book of Genesis, and the of Jacob upon the tribes of the nation of Israel. And he said God had, or rather God's recorded something that Jacob said about Naphtali that I thought you'd be interested in immediately. My ears turned up on end as you can imagine.

And the statement is this concerning Naphtali. Naphtali is a hind let loose. He giveth goodly words.

And she was persuaded that that was the exercise of heart that God had given to her, that I would be set free from the area which I was ministering, and would be able to go and find a place where I would have goodly words to be a source of blessing. And it was such a delightful thing for us to share this together, feeling so clearly that at the same day, at the same general time, the Lord would speak to us through these verses and the blessings upon these tribes. Now, this is the point.

We did move indeed to the south and the west. And the Lord allowed us to have a broadening ministry. And the Lord allowed us to have a radio ministry that has touched and influenced many, many thousands of families and homes, and with letters that are written and responses that come into the station and to us and requests.

But at times of dryness and in times of question in those earlier years, when we found out that there was a little bit something more to do than merely teach the word of God, that there were difficulties to seek to minister to God's people and to heal wounds and to seek to bind up and to have a pastoral shepherding care. And when the work seemed to be rather laborious and very burdensome, I would keep going back to these verses and say, well, now, Lord, you said that I would be full of your blessing and would have good words and would be able to bring that to God's people that would open up avenues and doors and be a source of help. And in effect, what I was saying was the sentence I started out our thoughts with, that prayer, my prayer at that time, was speaking back to God reverently, petitions that he had put into my heart by the Holy Spirit earlier.

The Lord had said, there will be blessing, you will go and there'll be fullness of a sense of my presence and enrichment there. And not because the vessel is worthy or the servant is competent, but rather because God has promised the promises of God given through the word of God by the Spirit provoke and stimulate a breathing out to God of the very words that he has put into our hearts. Now, before one would ever want to hold that up as an ideal or suggest it to others, it was rather interesting that gradually in my own reading, I began to see others that had a very similar experience.

And so we'd like to call our little devotional thought for this evening, Promises Provoke Prayer. I think it's A. W. Tozer who had suggested that you cannot believe the commandments of God, you must obey them. And you cannot obey the promises of God, you must believe them.

And we are apt to talk about believing in the commandments of God and talk about responding to promises. When our thought today is that God has given you promises in your life individually, exercises of heart. And it's quite possible that some of us are deprived of the rich blessing that there is available for us, because we have only believed the promise and not prayed for it to be effected.

God has given his word, and you and I are urged, since he has spoken to us by his Spirit and put certain things before us and filled our hearts and affections, now we are urged to turn back toward God and intercede, praying for his promises to be put into effect and bring around the blessing of God. Sometimes we have in our mind, I think, that we sometimes have some kind of manipulative power to persuade God to do things. And it might be better for me to understand what it is that God wants to do, what he has affirmed in scripture and to my soul by the witness of the Spirit of God and the word of God, and then turn that into intercessory prayer in order that it might be effected.

Now, to illustrate this, I'd like you to turn to 2 Samuel, and we have six different Old Testament illustrations, each with a shade of difference, but all accomplishing the same thing. A promise given to a believer, a child of God, an Old Testament saint, a promise affirmed, and the people turning and praying it into reality. In 2 Samuel 7, verse 12 we'll read from, And when thy days be fulfilled, thou shalt sleep with thy fathers.

I will set up thy seed after thee, which shall proceed out of thy bowels, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build an house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be his father, and he shall be my son.

If he commit iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men and with the stripes of the children of men. But my mercy shall not depart away from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away before thee, and thy house and thy kingdom shall be established forever before thee. Thy throne shall be established forever.

According to all these words, and according to all this vision, so did Nathan speak unto David. Then went King David in, and sat before the Lord. Now, why did he go in to sit before the Lord? Because God had made a promise to him through the prophet Nathan.

He had affirmed that his family would reign, and his children would reign, and there'd be a greater than David coming in a future day, and David believed the promise that was given to him. He embraced it genuinely, and so moved and so appreciative of God's affirmation, David, this bold man of faith, what does he do? Break away, run and tell the family, exultantly write a song, bear a testimony of some kind, click up his heels and cry out, Hosanna to the Lord. There's a multitude of things that you and I might do if we were told that you were going to reign and your children would reign on the throne until the great coming of the

King.

David went and sat before the Lord, and what does he say? Who am I, O Lord God, and what is my house that thou hast brought me hitherto? And this was yet a small thing in thy sight, O Lord God, but thou hast spoken also of thy servant's house for a great while to come. And is this the manner of men, O Lord God? What can David say more unto thee? For thou, Lord God, knowest thy servant for thy word's sake, and according to thine own heart hast thou done all these great things to make thy servant know them. Wherefore thou art great, O Lord God, for there is none like thee, neither is there any God beside thee, according to all that we have heard with our ears, and what one nation in the earth is like thy people, even like Israel, whom God went to redeem for himself, and to make him a name, and to do for you great things and terrible for thy land before thy people, which thou redeems to thee from Egypt from the nations and their gods.

For thou hast confirmed to thyself thy people Israel to be a people unto thee forever, and thou, Lord, art become their God. And now, O Lord God, the word that thou hast spoken concerning thy servant and concerning his house, establish it forever, and do as thou hast said. And let thy name be magnified forever, saying, The Lord of hosts is the God over Israel.

And let the house of thy servant David be established before thee. For thou, O Lord of hosts, God of Israel, hast revealed to thy servant, saying, I will build thee an house. Therefore hast thy servant found in his heart to pray this prayer unto thee." The promise of God to David had an effect upon David.

He believed the promise, he embraced it in reality, and it precipitated him into an action, and the action was prayer, asking God to effect his promise. Now, that's the central theme of our thoughts. Promises provoke prayer.

There have been promises given to us in the word of God. Paul's officials make mention of numbers of things that are ours. Do you pray for them to be real in your life? Do you ask God to effect them? Do we expect God to be able to implement his plans in his way? Has God spoken to you concerning your children, a business, a decision you must make? Do we then just go out and act upon it, or do we turn to God, and in this expression of conversation with him, breathe out to him that which he has spoken to our soul, demonstrating to our God in a very simple but eloquent fashion, we believe the promises of God.

We're going to pray for them to be effected. David said, I am not worthy, but I believe you now. Do what you have said for my family, and because you have promised it, I am praying for it.

You notice that in the latter part of 27, Therefore have thy servant found in his heart to pray this prayer unto thee. Among all the aspects of prayer, and there are many different ways and reasons for exercising ourselves before God, Matthew Henry says that God's promises are given to incite prayer. They are designed to create an attitude or an exercise of heart before God.

The first is prosperity for a family, his own family, and David prayed for it to be effected. Now if we would go over in something that is altogether a different vein, and it's in 1 Kings 18. The rough, coarse prophet from Gilead has stormed into Ahab's court, denounced him, and cried out for a drought, announcing the word of God and the promises of God to be fulfilled, that when God's people were disobedient, there would be drought.

Now he's been hunted and haunted. He's gone through a grueling experience, and when we take up the story, it's the end of approximately three and a half years of drought, and notice what is said in chapter 18 of 1 Kings, and it came to pass after many days that the word of the Lord came to Elijah in the third year, saying, Go, show thyself unto Ahab, and I will send rain upon the earth. That's the promise of God.

Go, show yourself to Ahab, and I will send rain. Now based upon that promise, Elijah gathers up his cloak, throws it around him, and starts off through this perilous journey. The king has been out looking for them.

It's an interesting narrative and an encounter on the way, and incidentally, there is this momentous experience that's involved up on the top of the mount, where all the prophets gather around, and they lacerate themselves, and they cry out, worshiping their God, and God is extending them a deafened ear, obviously. But the significant thing is, in verse 41 of the same chapter, Elijah said unto Ahab, Get thee up, eat and drink, for there is a sound of abundance of rain. You remember the circumstances.

He knelt and prayed, and then he sent his servants. Are there any clouds? No, and he prayed again. Why? Was Elijah telling God that he had to send rain? No.

But James says that Elijah is a man of like patience as we are, and he prayed, and it rained, and rather he prayed, and it didn't rain, and he prayed, and he asked God for rain, and the rain came. Now, James makes it sound so very simple that Elijah just prayed, and the rain came. Why did the rain come? Because God had promised it, and Elijah prayed for God's promise to be effected.

That's why he stayed and prayed seven times. That's why when the servant said, There's a cloud the size of a man's hand off on the horizon. That was sufficient.

And he goes running to the king and says, Now there's a sound of abundance of rain. Why? He knew that he did not persuade God to bring the rain. It was not he that had a hand on the forces of God's blessing, but rather he knew the mind of God.

He had the promise of God, and he prayed that that promise would be effected. Valuable lesson. For David, it was the blessing to come to his family.

Prosperity for the kingly family. Here is a practical sign of spiritual blessing. Maybe it is for this reason and this kind of exercise of heart that John Wesley wrote, God does nothing but in answer to prayer.

That's a remarkable statement, but Wesley believed that. God does nothing but in answer to prayer. That's why we should flood the throne room, affirming our confidence in God's blessings, frequently going to him and breathing out to him the things that he has spoken to us, the blessings that belong to God's people, the things that God wants to do for us, and God is waiting for people to believe his promises and speak to him, breathing out to God that which has been spoken to us by the Holy Spirit.

Turn if you would please to Isaiah, and this is the third illustration. In Isaiah chapter 37, Hezekiah is the king. Sennacherib, king of Assyria, has sent his mighty hordes down.

They have surrounded a land, have destroyed the major points of defense, and in a threatening letter sent by Rabshakeh, he's trying to intimidate the whole city of Jerusalem and the whole kingdom, and Hezekiah is terrified. And in Isaiah chapter 37 in verse 1, It came to pass when King Hezekiah heard it, he rent his clothes, covered himself with sackcloth, and went into the house of the Lord. Here he's before God, and he's just gripped with fear and apprehension.

They are no match for Sennacherib and his hordes. He sent Eliakim, who was over the household, and Shebna, the scribe, and the elders of the priests, covered with sackcloth, unto Isaiah the prophet, the son of Amoz. And they said unto him, Thus saith Hezekiah, This day is a day of trouble, and of rebuke, and of blasphemy.

For the children are come to the birth, and there is not strength to bring forth. It may be the Lord thy God will hear the words of Rabshakeh, whom the king of Assyria, his master, has sent to reproach the living God, and will reprove the words which the Lord thy God hath heard. Wherefore, lift up thy prayer for a remnant that is left." In a sense, he's saying, look at our condition.

Isaiah, pray for us. Speak to your God. Pray for us.

And Isaiah says in verse 6, Thus shall ye say unto your master. Thus saith the Lord, Be not afraid of the words that thou hast heard, wherewith the servants of king Assyria have blasphemed me. Behold, I will send a blast upon him, and he shall hear a rumor, and return to his own land, and I will cause him to fall by the sword in his own land.

Now there's a promise through the prophet Isaiah to the king. Another intimidating letter, another distressful circumstance is presented to him, and Hezekiah receives the letter that is sent in verse 14, and he goes to the house of the Lord, and spreads it before the Lord, and Hezekiah prays unto the Lord. In verse 16, O Lord of hosts, God of Israel, that dwellest between the cherubims, thou art the God, even thou alone of all the kingdoms of the earth, thou hast made heaven and earth.

Then, in the short tense of the Hebrew language, directives, just an imperative statement, brief and concise, incline thine ear, O Jehovah, hear, open thine eyes, O Jehovah, see, hear all the words of Sennacherib, which thou hast sent to reproach the living God, the great Elohim. Of a truth, Jehovah, the kings of Assyria have laid waste, and there he narrates what they have done, but in verse 20 says, Now therefore, O Jehovah, our Elohim, save us from his hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that thou art Jehovah, even thou only. And Isaiah comes, and this is Isaiah's answer in the latter part of 21, Whereas thou hast prayed to me against Sennacherib, king of Assyria, inasmuch as you have spoken to me, because you have prayed, I gave you a promise, I told you what was going to happen, and now you've come to me and laid it out before me, and because you have prayed, he goes on to describe all the detail, ending up with verse 34, By the way that he came, by then same shall he return, and shall not come into this city, saith the Lord, for I will defend this city, to save it for mine own sake, and for my servant David's sake.

The promise was given, what did it do for Hezekiah? He sit back and believe it, and folded his hands and waited for victory? No, he went to the presence of God, and poured it out, and with all of the intensity and a desire to adore and magnify God, he pours out his heart before God, asking him for the blessing that he promised. Now that's prayer. The promises of God provoked prayer.

For David, for Elijah, for Hezekiah, but God even broadens that in Isaiah, and if you turn to chapter 62, the first part of chapter 62 lets us know in a very special way that prayer is the very slender nerve that seems to move the very muscle of omnipotence on behalf of God's people, and God is waiting for prayer. Why, I do not know. Some things are wrought by God out of His own sovereign divine prerogative, and other things God waits for us to pray.

Are we a praying people? Are we missing out on rich blessings because we really do not believe His promises? We're not asking now just to make up something in our own minds, but to take the things that God has affirmed to us that we know to be objective truth, and pray them into reality. Chapter 62 affirms a great blessing for Zion. God's affection for them, His desire to bring them rest, His aspirations for them, and He uses such tender and enjoyable terms when we come down to verse five and six, in the middle of verse five, "...rejoiceth over the bride social, thy God rejoice over thee.

I have set watchmen upon thy walls, O Jerusalem, which shall never hold their peace day or night." He's affirming great blessing, and now He says, "...and ye that make mention of the Lord keep not silence, and give Him no rest till He establish, till He make Jerusalem a praise in the earth." The King James says, "...make mention of the Lord." I think it's Mr. Darby's translations, "...remembrancers," or those who pray, those that remember, people who are in prayer, "...don't give God any rest till He brings His time of blessing." Now that's the national blessing for the nation. Great time of God just inundating the people that Hezekiah, or rather Zechariah, says, "...I will pour out upon them the spirit of grace and supplication." That's when they will cry out to God and pray for the blessings that are affirmed, and they shall be affected. Why? Because they are praying? No, because they're fulfilling God's promises.

Moved by the promises of God, they plead with God to bring around those glorious effects. That's Jeremiah also. If you will turn to Jeremiah chapter 29, we have a very similar statement about the similar epic in the nation's history, and it underlines this same ongoing thought.

Verse 10, "...Thus saith the Lord, that after seventy years be accomplished at Babylon, I will visit you and perform my good word toward you in causing you to return to this place." Verse 12, "...then shall you call upon me, and I shall go and pray unto me, and I will hearken unto you. You shall seek me, and find me, you shall search for me with all your heart." What are they praying for? The promise that God has that he will deliver them. And it is over this that Daniel poured the books, and he ferreted, and he studied, and he uncovered the seventy years, and what, a man of prayers he was? He began to pray for this great deliverance.

And kings were moved, and the scribe was raised up, and Ezra led some back, and Nehemiah started the work as a result of prayer, because God had promised Jeremiah. When the Lord's people start to cry out to me, and seek this blessing, and pour out their soul, I will fulfill my word. What a great God is ours, and how we magnify him with that kind of prayer.

Because it acknowledges our own weakness, our own frailty, our own curious lack of strength to understand what to pray for. But when we start to pray this way, praying for God to effect his promises, praying for God to bring around his blessings, praying for God to be honored, and to prove that he is the God. Back in Isaiah, the earlier statement was that he was the God, and Mr. Darby translates and draws to our attention that this has become a title.

He is the same, or he is HE the same. And it's a curious expression that's repeated around 12 times in the Old Testament, affirming that this is a new title of God. He is HE the same.

And because he's made the promise, we can pray. And this is exactly what Hezekiah cried out for. Lord you promised, magnify yourself.

And he destroyed Sennacherib, one angel, defeated the whole hordes, and all of his armies, and God's people freed. What can God do, and what shall he do, when a company like yourself begin to read the

promises, and believe the promises, and pray? Corporate prayer amongst God's people is of tremendous importance. Promises are given to incite prayer.

It moves the muscle of omnipotence, because it's not that we are persuading God, it's affirming the fact that we believe what he has told us, and we're going to rely on what he has said. One of the outstanding portions of scripture in the prophet by Ezekiel teaches us the same lesson. Ezekiel chapter 36.

In Ezekiel chapter 36, there is an extraordinary statement about God's plan for the nation of Israel. And there is no way of describing what God is going to do, and how he shall implement this, although students of prophecy have long poured over a portion like this. But we mustn't miss out the simple and evident, valuable lesson concerning prayer.

Early in the chapter, he begins to make his statements concerning his affection for the people of God, and what he shall do. And the I will statements are interesting, and they just reveal the heart of God to be strong on behalf of his people. Verse 23, he says, I will sanctify my great name, which was profaned among the heathen, which you have profaned in the midst of them, and the heathen shall know that I am the Lord, saith the Lord God.

When I shall be sanctified in you before their eyes, I will take you from among the heathen, and gather you out of all countries, and bring you into your own land. Then I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean from your filthiness, and from all your idols will I cleanse you. A new heart will I give you, a new spirit I will put within you.

I will take away the stony heart of your flesh, I will give you an heart of flesh. I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes. Tremendous affirmations of the birth of a nation.

I have no doubt that this portion is exactly what the Lord Jesus is speaking to Nicodemus. He said, aren't thou a teacher of Israel, and you don't know about new birth? This is God communicating spiritual life to a nation. But, in verse 36, the end phrase, I the Lord have spoken it, and I will do it.

Thus saith the Lord God, I will yet for this be inquired of by the house of Israel to do it for them. I won't do it until they pray. I won't do it until they ask me to.

Isn't that interesting? A strange combination of welding together the mighty sovereign power of God and the great responsibility of men to acknowledge their weakness and frailty and dependence, and demonstrate it by prayer and calling upon the Lord. So, we started earlier with the thought that the promises of God should provoke prayer. That actually there's an aspect of prayer that is the breathing out to God in faith and confidence of things that he has spoken to us by his spirit through his words.

In the Old Testament we also write, my heart's desire and prayer for Israel is that they might be saved. Why was he praying that? Because he knew they were going to be. He had confidence to pray that.

No doubt or qualms in his mind, it was the promise of God. He could pray for that to be effected. So, whether it's David or Elijah or Hezekiah or the nation as a whole or the apostle Paul or you and me, pray and ask God to effect his promises and demonstrate our genuine simple confidence in him that we might be part and parcel to his grand work and be able to call upon him evidencing that we certainly believe and enjoy and have confidence in what he can and will do.

When I was a little younger and my children were very small, the Lord called upon me frequently to get away from the house and have meetings in different places and I tried to discreetly make the children think at least that if they were well-behaved, you don't say things like that, it's not a very good parental guideline, but if they're well-behaved you wouldn't be surprised that daddy might bring something back for them. And it was such an enjoyable thing. I had made a promise maybe one week or two weeks before and yet when I did come into the driveway and unloaded the bags and the children would help and I'd open up this bag and get some of my clothing out and we'd talk about the meetings and put away some of the lessons that I had, the flannel graphs and things like that, you could see them, they were looking at the little brown bag that was over there that hadn't been opened yet.

Why? And oh, wasn't it a pleasure? Why was that? Because I knew they had remembered and I knew they respected my word. Now sometimes joy is perhaps like this because I made them wait too long, but it was such an enjoyable thing for them. They just wanted so much and then I would carefully open up the bag and provide.

What were they saying? They were in their own quiet way asking me for what I had promised. And it's the heart of a father to want to just to be able to give to those that love him and anticipate and provide. And oh, our Heavenly Father wants to bless us.

The promises are innumerable. The potential blessings are rich. But he's waiting for us to believe it and pray.

Shall we pray? Our gracious God and Father, how thankful we are for thy word and for the rich spiritual promises. Every spiritual blessing ours in Christ Jesus. All the good things that are ours.

Oh, Father and God, we pray thee that those things that are written in the word and the things that are made so real to so many parents and loved ones and friends, different words that thou hast secreted away in our hearts, affirming us and building our confidence in thee. Oh, God, our Father, give us the kind of faith that believes that it can be done and ask thee to affect thy rich blessing. We trust that thou would work in our hearts and deepen our spiritual lives and give us more confidence in thyself.

And that in genuine humility, we might ask, believing and receive. Bless thy word to our hearts, we pray. Strengthen us in our life precious faith, we ask in the name and for the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen.

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