

Prayer Miracles

by E.M. Bounds

Prayer is a powerful force that can move God to do great things, and it requires faith and perseverance to bring about miracles and supernatural intervention.

Scripture: Exodus 8:12-13, Isaiah 59:1, Matthew 9:29, Matthew 17:20, Mark 11:24, Luke 7:9, John 11:41-42, Acts 9:36-41, Hebrews 13:8, James 5:16

Topics: "Faith in Action", "Power Of Prayer"

Description

E.M. Bounds emphasizes the significance of prayer in the life of Jesus Christ, illustrating that His earthly ministry was characterized by hearing and answering prayers, which continues in His heavenly role. Bounds highlights that miracles performed by Christ serve as lessons in faith and the power of prayer, demonstrating God's compassion and ability to work diversely in response to prayer. He stresses that faith is essential for the efficacy of prayer, as seen in the examples of Jesus' miracles, including the healing of the centurion's servant and the raising of Lazarus. Bounds argues that prayer is a powerful force that can invoke divine intervention, and he encourages believers to embrace the 'trade of praying' to witness miracles in their lives. Ultimately, he asserts that prayer remains a vital means through which God works in the world today.

Transcript

THE earthly career of our Lord Jesus Christ was no mere episode, a sort of interlude, in his eternal life. What he was and what he did on earth was neither abnormal nor divergent, but characteristic. What he was and what he did on earth is but the figure and the illustration of what he is and what he is doing in heaven. He is "the same yesterday and today, and forever." This statement is the divine summary of the eternal unity and changelessness of his character. His earthly life was made up largely of hearing and answering prayer. His heavenly life is devoted to the same divine business. Really the Old Testament is the record of God hearing and answering prayer. The whole Bible deals largely with this all important subject.

Christ's miracles are object lessons. They are living pictures. They talk to us. They have hands which take hold of us. Many valuable lessons do these miracles teach us. In their diversity, they refresh us. They show us the matchless power of Jesus Christ, and at the same time discover to us his marvelous compassion for suffering humanity. These miracles disclose to us his ability to endlessly diversify his operations. God's method in working with man is not the same in all cases. He does not administer his

grace in rigid ruts. There is endless variety in his movements. There is marvelous diversity in his operations. He does not fashion his creations in the same mold. Just so our Lord is not circumscribed in his working nor trammelled by models. He works independently. He is his own architect. He furnishes his own patterns which have unlimited variety.

When we consider our Lord's miracles, we discover that quite a number were performed unconditionally. At least there were no conditions accompanying them so far as the divine record shows. At his own instance, without being solicited to do so, to glorify God and to manifest his own glory and power, this class of miracles was wrought. Many of his mighty works were performed at the moving of his compassion and at the call of suffering and need, as well as at the call of his power. But a number of them were performed by him in answer to prayer. Some were wrought in answer to the personal prayers of those who were afflicted. Others were performed in answer to the prayers of the friends of those who were afflicted. Those miracles wrought in answer to prayer are very instructive in the uses of prayer. In these conditional miracles, faith holds the primacy and prayer is faith's deputy. We have an illustration of the importance of faith as the condition on which the exercise of Christ's power was based, or the channel through which it flowed, in the incident of a visit he made to Nazareth with its results, or rather its lack of results. Here is the record of the case:

And he could there do no mighty work, save that he laid his hands upon a few sick folk, and healed them. And he marvelled because of their unbelief.

Those people at Nazareth may have prayed our Lord to raise their dead, or open the eyes of the blind, or heal the lepers, but it was all in vain. The absence of faith, however much of performance may be seen, restrains the exercise of God's power, paralyzes the arm of Christ, and turns to death all signs of life : Unbelief is the one thing which seriously hinders Almighty God in doing mighty works. Matthew's record of this visit to Nazareth says, "And he did not any mighty works there because of their unbelief." Lack of faith ties the hands of Almighty God in his working among the children of men. Prayer to Christ must always be based, backed, and impregnated with faith.

The miracle of miracles in the earthly career of our Lord, the raising of Lazarus from the dead, was remarkable for its prayer accompaniment. It was really a prayer issue, something after the issue between the prophets of Baal and Elijah. It was not a prayer for help. It was one of thanksgiving and assured confidence. Let us read it:

And Jesus lifted up his eyes and said, Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me. And I know that thou hearest me always. But because of the people that stand by, I said it, that they may believe that thou hast sent me.

It was a prayer mainly for the benefit of those who were present, that they might know that God was with him because he had answered his prayers, and that faith in God might be radiated in their hearts.

Answered prayers are sometimes the most convincing and faith-creating forces. Unanswered prayers chill the atmosphere and freeze the soil of faith. If Christians knew how to pray so as to have answers to their prayers, evident, immediate, and demonstrative answers from God, faith would be more widely diffused, would become more general, would be more profound, and would be a much more mighty force in the world.

What a valuable lesson of faith and intercessory prayer does the miracle of the healing of the centurion's servant bring to us! The simplicity and strength of the faith of this Roman officer are remarkable, for he believed that it was not needful for our Lord to go directly to his house to have his request granted, "But speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed." And our Lord puts his mark upon this man's faith by saying, "Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel." This man's prayer was the expression of his strong faith, and such faith brought the answer promptly.

The same invaluable lesson we get from the prayer miracle of the case of the Syrophenician woman who went to our Lord in behalf of her stricken daughter, making her daughter's case her own, by pleading, "Lord, help me." Here was importunity, holding on, pressing her case, refusing to let go or to be denied. A strong case it was of intercessory prayer and its benefits. Our Lord seemingly held her off for a while but at last yielded, and put his seal upon her strong faith: "O woman, great is thy faith! Be it unto thee even as thou wilt." What a lesson on praying for others and its large benefits!

Individual cases could be named, where the afflicted persons interceded for themselves, illustrations of wonderful things wrought by our Lord in answer to the cries of those who were afflicted. As we read the evangelists' record, the pages fairly glisten with records of our Lord's miracles wrought in answer to prayer, showing the wonderful things accomplished by the use of this divinely appointed means of grace.

If we turn back to Old Testament times, we have no lack of instances of prayer miracles. The saints of those days were well acquainted with the power of prayer to move God to do great things. Natural laws did not stand in the way of Almighty God when he was appealed to by his praying ones. What a marvelous record is that of Moses as those successive plagues were visited upon Egypt in the effort to make Pharaoh let the children of Israel go that they might serve God! As one after another of these plagues came, Pharaoh would beseech Moses, "Entreat the Lord your God that he may take away this death." And as the plagues themselves were miracles, prayer removed them as quickly as they were sent by Almighty God. The same hand which sent these destructive agencies upon Egypt was moved by the prayers of his servant Moses to remove these same plagues. And the removal of the plagues in answer to prayer was as remarkable a display of divine power as was the sending of the plagues in the first instance. The removal in answer to prayer would do as much to show God's being and his power as would the plagues themselves. They were miracles of prayer.

All down the line in Old Testament days we see these prayer miracles. God's praying servants had not the least doubt that prayer would work marvelous results and bring the supernatural into the affairs of earth. Miracles and prayer went hand in hand. They were companions. The one was the cause, the other was the effect. The one brought the other into existence. The miracle was the proof that God heard and answered prayer. The miracle was the divine demonstration that God, who was in heaven, interfered in earth's affairs, intervened to help men, and worked supernaturally if need be to accomplish his purposes in answer to prayer.

Passing to the days of the early church, we find the same divine record of prayer miracles. The sad news came to Peter that Dorcas was dead and he was wanted at Joppa. Promptly he made his way to that place. Peter put everybody out of the room, and then he knelt down and prayed, and with faith said, "Tabitha, arise," and she opened her eyes and sat up. Knee work on the part of Peter did the work. Prayer brought things to pass and saved Dorcas for further work on earth.

Paul was on that noted journey to Rome under guard, and had been shipwrecked on an island. The chief man of the island was Publius, and his old father was critically ill of a bloody flux. Paul laid his hands on the old man, and prayed for him, and God came to the rescue and healed the sick man. Prayer brought the thing desired to pass. God interfered with the laws of nature, either suspending or setting them aside for a season, and answered the prayer of this praying servant of his. And the answer to prayer among those heathen people convinced them that a supernatural power was at work among them. In fact so true was this that they seemed to think a supernatural being had come among them.

After Herod killed James with the sword, Herod had Peter put in prison. The young church was greatly concerned, but they neither lost heart nor gave themselves over to needless fretting and worrying. They had learned before this from whence their help came. They had been schooled in the lesson of prayer. God had intervened before in the behalf of his servants and interfered when his cause was at stake. "Prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him." An angel on swift wings comes to the rescue, and in a marvelous and supernatural way releases Peter and leaves the prison doors locked. Locks and prison doors and an unfriendly king cannot stand in the way of Almighty God when his people cry in prayer unto him. Miracles if need be will be wrought in their behalf to fulfill his promises and to carry forward his plans. After this order does the Word of God illustrate and enlarge and confirm the possibilities of prayer by what may be termed "Prayer miracles."

How quickly to our straits follow our enlargements! God wrought a wonderful work through Samson in enabling him with a crude instrument, the jawbone of an ass, to slay a thousand men, giving him a great deliverance. Shortly afterward Samson was abnormally thirsty, and he was unable to obtain any water. It seemed as if he would perish with thirst. God had saved him from the hands of the Philistines. Could he not as well save him from thirst? "So Samson cried unto the Lord, and God clave a hollow place that was in the jaw, and there came water thereout, and when he had drunk, his spirit came again and he revived." God could bring water out of the jawbone just as well as he could give victory by it to Samson. God could change that which had been death-dealing to his enemies and make it life-giving to his servant. God can and will work a miracle in answer to prayer to deliver his friends, sooner than he will work one to destroy his enemies. He does both, however, in answer to prayer.

All natural forces are under God's control. He did not create the world and put it under law, and then retire from it, to work out its own destiny, irrespective of the welfare of his intelligent creatures. Natural laws are simply God's laws, by which he governs and regulates all things in nature. Nature is nothing but God's servant. God is above nature, God is not the slave of nature. This being true, God can and will suspend the working of nature's laws, can hold them in abeyance by his almighty hand, can for the time being set them aside, to fulfill his higher purposes in redemption. It is no violation of nature's laws when, in answer to prayer, he who is above nature makes nature his servant, and causes nature to carry out his plans and purposes.

This is the explanation of that wonderful prayer miracle of Old Testament times, when Joshua, in the strength and power of the Lord God, commanded the sun and moon to stand still to give time to complete the victory over the enemies of Israel. Why should it be thought a thing incredible that the God of nature and of grace should interfere with his own natural laws for a short season in answer to prayer, and for the good of his cause? Is God tied hand and foot? Has he so circumscribed himself that he cannot operate the law of prayer? Is the law of nature superior to the law of prayer? Not by any means. He is the God of prayer as well as the God of nature. Both prayer and nature have God as their maker, their ruler and their executor. And prayer is God's servant, just as nature is his servant.

The prayer force in God's government is as strong as any other force, and all natural and other forces must give way before the force of prayer. Sun, moon and stars are under God's control in answer to prayer. Rain, sunshine and drought obey his will. "Fire and hail, snow and vapor, stormy wind fulfilling his word." Disease and health are governed by him. All, all things in heaven and earth, are absolutely under the control of him who made heaven and earth, and who governs all things according to his own will.

Prayer still works miracles among men and brings to pass great things. It is as true now as when James wrote his epistle, "The effectual fervent, prayer of a righteous man availeth much." And when the records of eternity are read out to an assembled world, then will it appear how much prayer has wrought in this world. Little is now seen of the fruits of prayer compared to all that it has accomplished and is accomplishing. At the judgment day, then will God disclose the things which were brought to pass in this world through the prayers of the saints. Many occurrences which are now taken as a matter of course will then be seen to have happened because of the Lord's praying ones.

The work of George Muller in Bristol, England, was a miracle of the nineteenth century. It will take the opening of the books at the great judgment day to disclose all he wrought through prayer. This godly man never asked anyone for money for running expenses at his orphanage where hundreds of fatherless and motherless children were cared for. His practice was always to ask God for just what was needed, and the answers which came to him read like a record of apostolic times. He prayed for everything and trusted implicitly to God to supply all his needs. And it is a matter of record that never did he and the orphans ever lack for any good thing.

Of a holy man who has done so much for Christ and suffering humanity, it was said at the grave about him:

He prayed up the walls of an hospital, and the hearts of the nurses. He prayed mission stations into being, and missionaries into faith. He prayed open the hearts of the rich, and gold from the most distant lands.

Luther is quoted as once saying: "The Christian's trade is praying." Certainly, for a great reason, the preacher's trade should be praying. We fear greatly that many preachers know nothing of this trade of praying, and hence they never succeed at this trade. A severe apprenticeship in the trade of praying must be served in order to become a journeyman in it. Not only is it true that there are few journeymen at work at this praying trade, but many have never even been apprentices at praying. No wonder so little is accomplished by them. God and the supernatural are left out of their programs.

Many do not understand this trade of praying because they have never learned it, and hence do not work at it. Many miracles ought to be worked by our praying. Why not? Is the arm of the Lord shortened that he cannot save? Is his ear heavy that he cannot hear? Has prayer lost its power because iniquity abounds and the love of many has grown cold? Has God changed from what he once was? To all these queries we enter an emphatic negative. God can as easily today work miracles by praying as he did in the days of old. "I am the Lord; I change not." "Is anything too hard for the Lord?"

He who works miracles by praying will first of all work the chief miracle on himself. Oh, that we might fully understand well the Christian's trade of praying, and follow the trade day by day and thus make for ourselves great spiritual wealth!

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