

Prayer

by Stephen Olford

Stephen Olford's sermon emphasizes the transformative power of fervent prayer and the call to a deeper relationship with God through prayer.

Duration: 57:41

Scripture: Matthew 6:33, John 3:1-16

Topics: "Personal Evangelism", "Spiritual Renewal"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker shares his personal journey of encountering Jesus Christ. He was a professor who had achieved success in the academic world but felt a deep sense of emptiness and moral failure. He attended a rally where Billy Graham spoke on the topic of a professor encountering Jesus Christ, which intrigued him. After four days and nights of reading the Bible and praying, he experienced a breakthrough and felt the presence of God. He then preached passionately about his encounter with Jesus, and many people, including academics and students, responded to the message.

Transcript

Some time ago I was here, and some of you will remember my mentioning the name of a Dr. Fred Smith. I met him two years ago in Minneapolis. I happened to be there for some meetings and connection with the Bethel Baptist College Founders Week.

And he had written previously to ask me to speak at a Wednesday meeting in his home. I said if it were cleared with the college, I'd be happy to do so. I didn't know anything about the gentleman.

And I arrived in Minneapolis, and on that particular Wednesday morning he phoned up. I'd forgotten all about it because the college hadn't notified me that I was due to speak. And a strong Lancashire voice, an Englishman, came over the telephone and said, Are you Stephen Oldford? I said, I am.

He said, We're in for a great adventure. That intrigued me from the very beginning. He said, Are you ready for this evening? I said, This evening, let me see now.

Yes, he said, You're speaking in my home tonight. To cut a very long story short, he was at the hotel there to take me, first of all, to a dinner appointment. And I arrived at a house where about 25 to 30 people sat around a huge table and in various parts of the room having a meal.

And as I entered that place, I could see nothing but radiant faces. I was soon to learn that every one of those, with the exception of the host and hostess, had been led to Christ by this amazing man. And apparently I had given a message over the radio in Minneapolis the previous week on the Exchange Live.

And this had become a question point, a live question, and they just threw questions at me from every part of the room. And when I learned this, I began to ask questions about this Fred Smith. I didn't know who he was.

Then I learned very quickly that he was probably one of the foremost biochemists in this country. Born in England, educated in the old country, went to the University of Birmingham, earned every degree in his field possible, had all manner of honors conferred upon him in England and then over in this country. And then was given the chair, I understand, in the whole of the United States, the highest place as a professor of biochemistry at the University of Minnesota.

This dear man, seven years ago, met Jesus Christ. And his testimony was simply this, that he had reached the end of academic achievement. He said there were no more intellectual carrots to nibble at.

And this brought him a tremendous sense of dissatisfaction. He thought he would be completely satisfied. Instead, it was just the reverse.

Furthermore, he discovered, as he put it, that all the standards he set in the academic world weren't matched by his own moral life and hope. And this depressed him. And in a state of utter restlessness, he looked around for an answer.

And he discovered that Billy Graham was coming to Minneapolis for one rally. And that Billy Graham was speaking on the subject of a professor encounters Jesus Christ. And he said, this was very interesting.

And he said, I went along. And I listened to what this young man had to say. And as far as I was concerned, it was very reasonable.

And he said, I went away, determined that I was to look into this. And for four days, and practically four nights, he read the word, got down on his knees and tried to pray. And somewhere along the way, over those four days and four nights, he said, I broke into light.

The first man who introduced me to the quotation, by Blaise Pascal, that great philosopher-scientist, who said that the supreme achievement of reason is to bring us to the end of reason. And he said, I discovered that there was a dimension I hadn't even investigated. And that dimension was life in Christ.

He was converted seven years ago. You know, within the first two or three weeks, he had led I don't know how many of his technicians on his floor to Christ, and a number of his professors. And the night I met in his home, after this dinner appointment, I'll never forget.

Because we went back to this house, and I could understand why he didn't have me to dinner. From wall to wall, nothing but seats. And apparently this was a meeting they had every Wednesday night, without any advertising at all, just mouth to mouth.

And the place was just full of academics. Lawyers, doctors, professors, students, undergrads, and the rest of it. Just packed right out.

And I stood there in the corner waiting, because I had to speak to this crowd. And when he looked around and seemed to think, well, that's about all tonight, he turned to his wife, he said, do you think that's all, dear? Yes, she said, I think you can start. And he got up, and he just walked right over and he said, ladies and gentlemen, it's a joy to have a fellow Englishman here tonight to talk to you.

And I've asked him to talk to you about Jesus. Now talk to them about Jesus. There was no prayer.

There was no formal introduction. And bless your hearts, I just talked to them aloud, Jesus. I've never known a night like it.

The quiet hush of God's Spirit came upon that meeting, and God did such a work that I had the joy yesterday of meeting not one, not two, but a whole host of people who trusted Christ that night. I asked folks to bow in prayer, we had a word of prayer. Then he said, now any questions? Questions were asked from the floor, all in the stream of what I'd been talking about.

Then he said, would you lead in prayer again? I led in prayer, and thought to bring people to the place of commitment. And then he said, now those of you who know Christ, help those who don't. And he just let the meeting loose like that.

And there in the corner of that lounge that I stood only yesterday, there were just pouring over the Scriptures, and one after another trusted Christ. Well now, I want to tell you something. I saw something that night that made me want to know more about this man.

And deep, deep into the night, into the early hours of the morning, I sat with Dr. Fred Smith in a car, looking into the face of a rugged Englishman, a brilliant, prodigious mind. And seeing something of apostolic Christianity that made my heart so hungry that I couldn't talk about anything else when I got back to my church. He did something to me.

He made an impact in my life. The very next day, before I was out of bed, and this was, I would say, 2 or 3 o'clock in the morning when we parted, he phoned me up and he said, what do you think? A great adventure this morning. I said, what was it, doctor? He said, well, a great scientist has flown across the country.

He said he came into my study, and he showed me a number of chemicals. And he asked my evaluation. He said, I tested them, and I said, do you know that two-thirds of the life of these chemicals are already gone? He said, is that right? He said, yes.

And what is more, two-thirds of your life, already gone. And then in his typical Lancashire style, he said, my dear scientific friend, have you made arrangements for the disposition of your soul? In a few moments, the man was on his knees, and he was leading him to Christ. I met that man.

It's absolutely fabulous. And he was leading people to Christ all over the place, students, professors, laymen, and the rest. Eight months ago, he had a lot of pain.

He went to the Mayo Clinic, and Dr. Morlock there examined him, ordered an operation, and they discovered he was full of cancer. And for eight months, we've been in touch. Not once have I ever heard him complain, as he's talked to me over the telephone or written to me, always rejoicing, invariably leading people to Christ in a hospital or wherever he went.

Last Monday night, he died. Before he died, he called me, and he made a covenant with me. He said, Stephen Alford, he said, if you happen to be in this country when I die, I want you to covenant with me that you'll preach my memorial sermon in the University of Minnesota.

So although I had commitments here, I phoned up Dr. Sleaf, and he graciously released me because he saw the meaningfulness of all this. I flew to Minnesota. And I spoke not only at the university, but I spoke at a large church, first of all, at one o'clock for a memorial service, and then at four o'clock in the university.

And I want to tell you young people, just before I turn to the word of God, I've never been so moved in all my life. All over that church and in the whole two or three front rows of that university were professors, technicians, and students, and laymen, and one leading mathematician that he had personally led to Christ. How I ever rose to the occasion, I don't know, because I was so choked and so moved by the whole thing.

But I did exactly what he asked me to do, and both in the church and in the university. I preached my heart out. I preached on John 3, 1 to 16, the story of Nicodemus, how a professor encountered Jesus Christ.

And the hush of God came down upon that university meeting. The place was packed on the campus of the University of Minnesota, packed. And when we closed in prayer, and I asked that they stand very reverently to honor this man, I somehow felt that man after man, young person after young person, was facing Jesus Christ personally.

Before I stood to speak, his colleague, Dr. Sam Truckwood, got up to give him a scientific tribute. And he made this statement, that in his knowledge of all biochemists across the world today, there are three outstanding men in the world for original thinking and discovery. Of those three, he said, I would put Dr. Fred Smith first.

I won't stop to tell you some of the inventions and some of the discoveries and some of the research he has done. But all I know is this, that beyond a scientist, beyond a biochemist, was a man who knew Jesus Christ so intimately, so radiantly, that he could never move anywhere without something happening. And with this I conclude.

Lying on his hospital bed in the last few days of his illness, he led the leading doctor and pathologist to Jesus Christ. He willed his body to the university and to the hospital in order that research might be done on it. The man who did the post-mortem on that body was the very doctor he led to Christ.

I met him, radiantly happy. The fellow who drove me to the airport was a young fellow called Bill Perry, a businessman that he led to Christ in one of the Wednesday night meetings. And Bill said that he saw the doctor slip away.

He was the last one there. Apparently he was heavily sedated and Mrs. this very tired went back home. He said, you sit down.

And presently he opened his eyes, he was losing his sight, and he asked for oxygen. He said, I want oxygen. And they gave him oxygen.

And as he drew it in, his eyes came alive again and he could see. And he said, Bill, Bill, the Bible is God's book to simple people. Don't debate it.

Don't dispute it. Believe it. Live it.

Stand fast. And sank back. And he was away.

So I've come from something which has pulled everything out of me. But I've seen something that's made me tremendously hungry. To know a life like that in Jesus Christ.

One last little word. His daughter, his oldest daughter, by the way he led his wife and all his four children to Christ. And his oldest daughter was there and she said to me, she said, Mr. Alford, before my father became a Christian, I didn't know him.

He was a hard disciplinarian. He was an impossible snob. He had no patience for anybody who wasn't in his intellectual bracket.

And I felt I had no daddy. But when he met Jesus Christ, I found a father. Because his Christ meant so much to me.

I just had to love him. That girl is in a liberal college pursuing a particular course she set before her. In this one first semester in that college, she has led 13 fellow collegians to Christ.

And started a Bible reading with 25 each week. And she sat there radiantly telling me the story of what Jesus Christ means to her. Led to Christ by her own father.

Isn't that the kind of Christianity you long to see? I'm telling you, I can never be quite the same again having met a man like that. And quite frankly, I'm not interested in anything else that doesn't produce this quality of Christianity. I believe what God is wanting today are the types of Christians that really need an explanation.

And most of us don't need an explanation. Let's bow together in prayer. Savior, we thank thee upon every remembrance of this dear man, whom thou didst not only save and bless and use, but now hast called to thyself.

And even, Lord, as we've talked about him, we ask for the covering and protecting of that wonderful victory work of the cross for his dear wife and the four children and those university men and women and fellows and girls who heard the message yesterday and that great crowd of friends and relatives who attended that church. Lord, if thou would lay upon our hearts the burden to pray for some of those professors, that they through the testimony of this man and the message they heard yesterday might come to Christ, then Lord, do that in our hearts tonight. That thy name may be glorified.

Now as we turn to thy word, speak, we pray thee, through thy holy word, some message to meet each one of our needs here tonight, because we ask it for thy dear name's sake. Amen. I want you to turn with me to the epistle of James, chapter 5. Although my heart is burdened for everyone here tonight, I am particularly interested in the occasion that brings us together, and that is, of course, preparation for and expectation for Ben Lippin next year, next summer.

And as I chatted with my dear and beloved colleague, Dr. Fleece, over the telephone, I feel that the note we should strike at the beginning of this particular conference and as we look forward to that three weeks of meetings is the subject of revival and the subject of prayer. I shared a very wonderful week with your good president at Dallas, as you heard a few moments ago. And I think you'd agree with me, I have

seldom seen such hunger amongst ministers.

Indeed, amongst layfolk, for God's death, the fullness in Christ, for revival. And in the context of all that hunger and expectation and the joy of the ministry of the word, Dr. Fleece said something in one of his messages that went right home to my heart and has brought to birth something of what I want to share with you tonight. He said, I guarantee to say there isn't one of us here in this audience, some words to this effect, who wouldn't believe in prayer.

We all believe in prayer. We all believe in prayer. But do we really pray? Not one of us disbelieves in prayer, but do we really pray? Do we know what it is to pray? And he may not know it, but I made a covenant in my heart that as a minister, as a husband, as a father, as a simple Christian, I'll go back home to learn something more, not only of theology in prayer, but of practice in prayer.

To gain that background, I want to say something tonight. So will you read with me from verse 13? 513. And let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord.

And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up. And if he hath committed sins, they shall be forgiven him. Confess your fault one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed.

The sexual, fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much. Elias, or Elijah, was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain, and it rains not on the earth by the space of three years and six months. And he prayed again, and heaven gave grace, and the earth brought forth her fruit.

I want to restrict what I have to say to the last part of verse 16, and the illustrators mention that James elects to use here the sexual, fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much, or prevailing in prayer. There is an old tradition which informs us that James, the brother of our Lord Jesus Christ, was nicknamed Camel Knees. The reason for this was that when he was being prepared for burial, his friends discovered that he had great calluses on his knees.

He had often knelt in prayer, so often, in fact, that he had developed Camel Knees. And so when I come to think about James, and particularly what he has to say about prayer throughout this epistle, I am particularly arrested and interested. And he makes a statement here which I want to get hold of afresh tonight, even as I preach it to you.

Though I've done my preparation, and though I've done my praying for this message, I want God to speak afresh to my own heart. He says that the effectual, fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much. He sets forth a proposition, and then he takes that proposition and he illustrates it by the life of a man called Elijah.

Many of us have done studies, I'm sure, in the character and life of Elijah. And I think you'll agree with me that as you read through the story of Elijah, there isn't a final, there isn't a final word in the Old Testament as to what was the secret of his power. Until we come to this particular passage of God's Word, and we discover that Elijah was pre-eminently a man of prayer, a man of prevailing prayer.

For Elijah, prayer was supernatural, mighty in its working, prayer that availed much. And as James takes one of the greatest propositions on prayer throughout the whole of the New Testament, he says, where shall I find an illustration, where shall I find a man who fits into this context? And he picks up Elijah and he

says, Elijah is my man. And so what I want to do tonight, very simply, is to take this proposition and to look at it, and then to illustrate it right the way through by the life of Elijah.

Our proposition, the effectual, fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much. The illustration, Elijah. And to those who are the fellowship of Ben Lippin here, I want to say that my burden this evening, particularly, is that God is going to give us such a vision, such a burden for prayer, that we're going to pray through, not only for blessings this weekend, but during the coming days, and especially as we gather for those three weeks at Ben Lippin.

How wonderful it would be if from that mount of trust, there poured forth the streams of living water from the eternal hills. If God moved and broke in upon those constant sessions, and caught us up into what I believe is the only solution for our hopeless age, a spirit sense, visitation, revival. Consider first with me what I'm calling the ministry of prevailing prayer.

The ministry of prevailing prayer. The effectual, fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much. James says that this ministry is for men and women that might be termed righteous.

Righteous men and women. The effectual, fervent prayer of a righteous man, a righteous woman, availeth much. And the question immediately arises, well, who? Who fits that picture? And I'm happy to be able to share with you tonight that I think three answers sum it up.

First of all, people who are just ordinary people. Yes, ordinary people like you and me. Ordinary men and women.

The effectual, fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much. And who is such a righteous man? Just ordinary people. Why do I say ordinary people? Because James goes right on to say Elijah was a man subject to like passions as we are.

Mighty man that he was with natural endowments and undoubtedly with spiritual gifts as well. In himself as a man, he was no superhuman man. No.

He was just an ordinary man. A man like the subject, like rather, to passions as we are. Subject to passions like you and me.

With all his amazing achievements, with all his amazing accomplishments, we see him fleeing in fear from a woman after tremendous victory on Mount Carmel. We see him shrinking from a prophet's yoke. We see him on one occasion sitting under a juniper tree longing to die and to end his life.

He was a man subject to like passions as you. As myself. Just ordinary people.

And I am to find nowhere, not a hint, in the word of God that would justify the thought that prayer is specifically for certain types of people. I believe there's such a thing as the gift of intercession for some folks who cannot be used in other areas, who can give long periods of prayer, but there's a whole area of prayer that every one of us is involved in, if we're children of God at all. Just ordinary Christians like you and me.

Ordinary not in the wrong sense, but ordinary in the sense in which there's nothing very special about us in terms of endowments or gifts, but we're just committed Christians. Elijah was a man subject to like passions as we are. But I hasten to add quickly, he was not only an ordinary man, he was an obedient

man.

He was a righteous man, a man rightly related to the will of God. Again and again read throughout the king's account and you'll find that he went and did that which was according to the word of the Lord. He went and did that which was according to the word of the Lord.

He went and did that which was according to the word of the Lord. He was an obedient man. Ordinary man though he was, he was totally sold out to obedience to God.

And as for his life, this was his set purpose. Whatever the Lord my God shall command, that's obedience for me. And James says, Elijah is my man, subject to like passions like anyone, ordinary in that sense, but supremely a righteous man.

Because he went and did that which was according to the word of the Lord. Now I want to remind young people here and older ones here, if you ever want to know the depth and height of prevailing prayer, one of the prerequisites is not only that you are a committed Christian, but that you know this life of obedience. If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me, says the Father.

If I look with approval on anything in my life which is out of adjustment to the will of God, the Lord will not hear me. And it's my Savior who said, if ye abide in me and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done. And it shall be done.

Oh, oh to learn, oh to learn how to abide in my Savior, and to allow his word so to dwell richly in me, that no revealed will, no revealed law, no revealed word that comes from heaven is ever disobeyed in my life, then I qualify as a righteous man. I qualify as a righteous man. And the effectual servant prayer of a righteous man availeth much.

Am I speaking to someone here who has discovered these last few weeks that the heavens are as brass, and that prayer is meaningless? And you're not breaking through. You're not moving through to the throne. You're not touching that scepter upon that throne.

You're not prevailing with God. Is it that you have lost out on the issue of obedience? If ye abide in me and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you. There was another aspect about this man.

He was an ordinary man, yes, but an obedient man. And with all, a man of vision, an observant man. He was the only man in his day and generation who could see things as they were.

And he could look into the face of the king and say, Thou and thy father's house have forsaken the commandments of the Lord, and Thou hast followed after David. He could see the issues of the day. He could see right through the facade of hypocrisy.

And it didn't matter if it was the throne of the country. It didn't matter if it was the king upon the throne. He could see where sin was.

And he was a man of observation. And there is a word in the book that says, Mine eye affecteth mine heart, and I have discovered long in my own experience that observation leads to intercession. It's when my heart is affected by what I see that I'm driven to pray.

And I would remind you all that where there is no vision, the people perish. Where there is no vision, the people throw off all moral restraint. And the darker the situation around us in these days, despite all we know of prophecy concerning men and evil seducers waxing worse and worse, I maintain that society around us is invariably a reflection of the strength or the weakness of the Church.

Where there is no prophetic vision, where there are no people who know how to prevail with God, where there are no people who can cry like John Knox, God, Satan, Coughlin, or I die, you'll find our people throwing off moral restraint, right, left, and center. I wonder how many of you are really concerned about the world and its needs, the mission field, and its great, great needs. Your church, your minister, your unconverted friends, your unconverted relatives.

I wonder if you have the eyes of a Fred Smith who saw potential Christian in everyone that he saw, everyone that he met. And because of it, because of it, it led him to prayer, led him to prayer. His wife told me, his wife told me yesterday, that many a time, four o'clock in the morning, he heard, she heard him in his study there, pouring out his heart for his professors, for his technical advisors, for his students, naming them one by one.

He had a loose leaf book, and all those names, all those names, were down on that loose leaf book. And as he lay in the hospital, Bill Perry told me that he had a whole row of people around him, and as he would name some of the names that were still unconverted, he'd say, now would you pray for Bill? Would you pray for John? Would you pray for Professor So-and-So? And as they prayed, he would say, Amen! Observation leading to intercession. He was a man of observation.

Yes, the problem with so many of us is that we're completely blind, absolutely blind to the desperate needs of men and women, of a world traveling, traveling, of churches, of relatives, of friends, around us who are out of Christ. And we see them, and yet we don't see them. I say, Jeremiah, mine eye affecteth mine heart.

The ministry of prevailing prayer. So let me move hurriedly to what I want to call now the manner of prevailing prayer. The effectual fervent prayer, the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man as they live much.

And Elijah prayed in his prayer, or prayed earnestly. And Elijah prayed again. What do we learn from this? That the manner of praying which prevails, beloved, the manner of praying which prevails has certain characteristics about it.

In the first place, it is fervent prayer. Fervent prayer. Fervent prayer.

The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man as they live much. Look at your margin there and notice that Elijah prayed earnestly, or as the margin puts it, Elijah prayed in his prayer. So many of us say prayers, but we never pray.

We never pray. Like the little children's hymn, I often say my prayers, but do I really pray? And here I want to come to something which I feel so deeply, I must share it with you, even though it's bleakly. I'm convinced more and more that there is nothing, there is nothing in my life as a Christian that the devil seeks to hammer at and disturb me in than the ministry of prayer and devotion.

And you know as well as I do that you can go, you can go and sit down with a light book and read it without any tiredness or weariness. You know that you can switch on your television and you can watch a

program and not notice the hours switch by. You know how easy it is to sit down and socialize or visit with friends and talk deep into the night and not complain about being tired.

And yet take that same period of time any given day, any given evening and say now I'm setting this aside in order to pray and your first complaint is that you're tired, you're weary, somehow or other you can't concentrate. Or that the Bible doesn't make sense in these moments. I need a bit of relaxation.

That you're being attacked at the deepest level of your life by Satan himself. And I believe the meaning of those words in Romans concerning the infirmity in the flesh and the need of the Holy Spirit to help us to pray, to help us to pray, that's the word that's used there, to help us to pray until we know the mind of God and the will of God in our prayer and we pray even with groanings which cannot be uttered is something that we've got to lay hold on. You and I have got to lay hold on.

This is what Paul means when he talks about praying in the Holy Ghost. This is what he means when he talks about prayer and supplication in the Spirit. And I believe just as really as I claim the fullness of the Holy Spirit and the mighty anointing for an act of preaching or for an act of witnessing so day by day I've got to learn and I'm asking myself this question in a place where I kneel down and I say Lord before I open my heart to thee in what I'm going to describe as surveilling prayer I want thee to take over my mind and my heart and my will by the indwelling Holy Spirit take over these faculties of my personality as I directly and consciously will them to thee that I might be a temple that I might be an instrument through which thou art going to pray the will of God and even if it means groanings and the inner paraclete is matching the heart of the heavenly paraclete and prayer is being married and I'm winning through it's inward prayer it's costly prayer it's transalient prayer it's the prayer which is in as much and the question is are you prepared for it?

Are you prepared to pay the price for this kind of prayer?

Ah says the psalmist I prayed and I prayed again and Isaiah reminds us when Zion's trials she brought forth her children and I don't believe we're ever going to know surveilling in prayer until we know what it is to be praying in the Holy Ghost like that and may I add quickly that manner of praying not only not by servancy but by frequency Elijah prayed and then we read that he prayed again and the idea behind the whole word and construction there is that this man knew continuous prayer it's so easy to be stirred to a ministry of prayer in a meeting like this and then to forget all about it in three weeks time to be spasmodic and intermittent but all to know all to know the eternal spirit within us it's a prayer that's characterized by frequency ah yes men ought always to pray said Jesus

Christ and not to faint men ought always to pray there's no mood in that sentence at all that word has no mood ought, I owe it to God men ought always to pray and not to faint and if you're not always praying you're fainting and there's only one way to save the embarrassment of fainting and that is to cast yourself down upon the ground and to put your head between your knees and it's an interesting and very suggestive thing that after that tremendous battle on Mount Carmel when Elijah's given everything everything, called down the very fire of heaven upon that altar he wanted to pray for the rain he wanted to pray for refreshing showers and faint in his praying he cast himself down before the Lord and put his head between his knees and he prayed and he prayed again seven times over until

his servant said there's a hand in the sky there's a little cloud out of the sea like a man's hand he left his very impression as it were upon the very heavens and you and I know nothing of praying until we know a witness in our hearts that God has heard us that we've broken through we've left an impression upon

heaven itself because of our praying it's a prayer that's characterized by focus, by definiteness yes, he prayed that it might not rain and it rained not by the space of three years and six months he prayed again that it should rain and it rained abundantly it was a prayer that affected his object and I believe God in heaven sometimes holds back the answers to our prayers in order to discover the seriousness and reality of our praying not that praying ever changes the heart of God

don't mistake me the change takes place in us we pray and pray and pray until the change takes place in us and makes it consistent with God's righteousness to do what otherwise would be inconsistent for him to do prayer is not the overcoming of the reluctance of God to give prayer is the adjustment of my will to the will of God that God might do what he's been waiting to do but he wants us to get into the place of prayer the manner of praying the effectual servant prayer of a righteous man is a less much the effectual prayer the effectual prayer that affects his object but I want to conclude this evening by just sharing with you and you can put what you like you can put what you like in those two little words the less much the effectual servant prayer of a righteous man a very less much a

very less much what would you like to put in there it's wide open it's a very less much and in the life of Elijah this was true read through the story of the miracles that he effected by the power of God and it's a study in itself but since our time is limited I want to just draw three illustrations from the life of that man related especially to our expectation of and for the coming conference at Ben Lippon and for this campus right here and for the churches that some of you represent in Columbia here when this man knelt to pray I want you to notice that prevailing prayer first of all when Elijah took his prayer light to the top of Mount Carmel as it were and stood there before that whole pagan prophet crowd and cried to the heavens and said let it be known this day that thou art God the

glory of God was manifested and he made an open show of the false prophets to try and take over them and I believe that the first thing that we should ever want is that it should be revealed in the glory of God God's glory God's glory, God's honor God's name, God's faith God's vindication in the presence of men triumphing over the powers of darkness and what I'm asking you to do tonight my friend is not to take your prayer mat to Mount Carmel but take your prayer mat to Mount Calvary and kneel there at the foot of that cross and recognize that when Jesus died his death was a cosmic yes and victorious effect throughout the centuries and throughout eternity and on the basis of that cowardly work any request in the will of God was made possible no devil in hell, no man on earth no angel in

heaven can thwart the man who prays on the ground not for victory but unto victory why, because the victory has already been gained he triumphed over the powers of darkness I believe this is the whole meaning of Paul's great words in 1 Corinthians 10 when he talks about the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds casting down imagination and every high thought that exalts itself against the knowledge of God bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ weapons of our warfare not carnal but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds victorious praise God has given us the basis of prayer it's cowardly that his glory might be revealed triumphing over the powers of darkness but when Elijah prayed something

else happened he triumphed not only over the powers of darkness but he triumphed over the power of drought the heaven was locked up for three years and six months but when that man knelt to pray he opened heaven oh the wonder of it just imagine a mere man, a mere man subject to life passions as we are yet knowing God so intimately that he could dictate to the throne of heaven and say father, father three years and six months that's enough now open heaven and let it come and it came and he released

refreshing showers upon a very dry and thirsty land so suggest to us the revelation of the glory of God triumphing over the powers of darkness surely this is a glorious illustration of the reviving of God's people by the refreshing showers from heaven and I am personally convinced and this is my

hope stick that outside of the coming again of the Lord Jesus Christ and outside of the normal healthy work of evangelism within the given church of Jesus Christ and through the church of the greatest need of the hour despite our great society and despite all that's being said to frame up a picture that's hiding the rottenness and corruption and debauchery of our land today the greatest need of the hour is for holy ghost revival and I don't believe it's ever going to come until men know how to pray until men know God well enough to be able to say oh God open heaven and send down refreshing showers though I know the mighty, mighty sovereignty of God is involved and is moving yet I cannot detach it I cannot detach it from praying people I cannot detach it from praying people I've read too

deeply and too long and too voluminously on revival to be able to be challenged on that point 1957 in New York State in New York City one man knelt to pray he was so burdened for revival and he put up a little card and he said any interested to pray for revival come in and pray and he practically spent a whole evening alone praying then six joined him then a few more joined him and the famous Fulton Street prayer meeting started and that prayer meeting grew until it had its tentacles all over the city of New York and a hundred years ago practically God broke through in revival in New York and in a matter of a few weeks 250,000 people rushed into the kingdom without a scat of advertising without any publicity without any preaching God just moved mightily everywhere and anyhow why, because

people knew how to pray 1859 same thing happened in Ulster in County Armstrong rather in a little school house where four fellows got down to pray and they asked God oh God we can't, we can't stand this any longer thou must render heavens and come down to pray for revival and the 1859 revival that leaped over to Scotland and even affected England started in a prayer meeting in the very school spot that I had personally visited 1904 revival started in Wales and it started because a man called Evan Roberts bent over a seat in a Baptist church and said oh God bend me bend me bend me and God bent him and broke him and taught him how to pray and he started to create a prayer cell to those who were similarly burdened 300 prayer meetings all over the Nestle area and Swansea area of South Wales

that stretched up until almost the principality was a prayer meeting and God broke through from heaven the pubs and saloons were shut up and God moved in swift throughout the principality of Wales because a man knew how to pray and I'm telling you one of the most outstanding memories I have in my mind's eye and deeply stamped upon my spirit and my character is the three hours I spent with Evan Hopkins now an old man losing his memory only being able to speak coherently for a few minutes at a time looking up into the wrinkled face of Evan Roberts as he told the story of how God moved mighty through Wales and I looked beyond those eyes as he is into that man's whole being that was given up to prayer he wasn't a preacher he did a little preaching particularly in the area of exploitation but

he wasn't an expositor he wasn't an evangelist he was just a man burnt up with prayer awakenings have taken place in the Hebrides for instance in the northern Hebrides when seven people got together to pray and to ask God to break through in revival and some of you have heard the story of Duncan Campbell I heard him tell it at Keswick how God saved so amazingly so strangely so sovereignly but we could never detach it from prayer I want to say in conclusion that there's another miracle that illustrates the principle not only the triumph over the powers of darkness not only the triumph over the powers of drought but the triumph over the power of death both in Elijah's life and in Elisha's life there's a very interesting illustration

that underlies the principle I am seeking to share with

you tonight the widow's son who died to remember so unexpectedly and the poor mother brokenhearted brings the boy to the attention of a great prophet and to remember how he stretched himself out upon that child and he cried from the depth of his soul Oh Lord my God cause that this child's soul shall come into him again and the child needs I've been an evangelist for 22 years now and I'm more convinced about it now than I've ever was in my life that souls are hardly one and that there's no such a thing as cheap evangelism say that which is ludicrous or even satanic and I don't believe we're ever going to see souls saved in mighty mighty mighty numbers until we know what it is to pray and to pray and to give ourselves to the dead to give ourselves to the dead to stretch ourselves as it were

upon those dead people and cry that life might come into them this is a fervent work of God we cannot convert we can only point the way God save but God save and answer the prayer my dear friend Peter Letchford-Hill may remember this we have a common friend and I'll never forget a series of meetings he had at the Royal Albert Hall for some reason or other the publicity didn't go right for some reason or other there weren't quite the prayer warriors that were amassed for this particular series of meetings a place that seats nearly 8000 people and his heart was very very very fearful as to how these meetings would go this particular season and yet in an amazing way the place filled up and God saved more people during those days of meetings than he'd ever known previously in the Royal Albert

Hall and he couldn't understand it he almost turned in on himself and said well is there any point in giving ourselves to prayer and getting prayer cards out if this can happen and then one day a letter arrived from South America it was a letter from a little woman who had lost both her hands and both her feet and part of her face living in a leprosary and in God's own providential and amazing way a journal had come into her hands and it had been translated to her though she knew English for she dictated the letter to Tom Reese a journal came into her hands in which she read about the coming meetings at the Royal Albert Hall and for some reason or other though a letter though in a leprosarium she knew about the Royal Albert Hall she knew of this man Tom Reese and she knew about these

meetings and she said to God oh God I'm going to pray that God is going to rest in those meetings as Tom Reese has never known in his life and she spent night and day night and day before God on her face for those meetings at the Royal Albert Hall and God just broke through and multitudes were won to Jesus Christ the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous woman of a righteous man of ailing much and you only have to be an ordinary person utterly obedient observant given over to fervent faithful focused prayer and you can triumph over the powers of darkness to the glory of God over the power of drought with refreshing rain over the power of death in bringing to life men and women dead in trespasses and in sin I'm hungry for that aren't you?

I want to know something about that in my life it's one thing to preach about it I want to know it everything else is but straw if I don't know how to prevail with my God what kind of a missionary am I going to be? if I don't know how to prevail with my God what kind of a pastor am I going to be? if I don't know how to prevail with God what kind of a wife to a missionary or to a pastor am I ever going to be? if I don't know how to prevail with my God what kind of a witness am I going to be in business? in this inscrutable wisdom God has gathered up and locked up the release of the mighty resurrection life of Jesus through the Holy Spirit in this radiant, this radiant kind of witness that we were hearing about just now through prayer through prayer show me anywhere in the scripture where you can be filled with the Holy Spirit without prayer Pentecost is preceded by the most intense prayer when Jesus says if you being evil know how to

give good gifts unto your children how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask do you know how to ask? prevailing in prayer will you covenant with me tonight to pray like that as God shall teach us Lord teach me to pray will you enlist in this prayer army not just for campus here not just for Benjamin but for a church wide revival if you are prepared to say yes you tell the Lord as we bow together in prayer let us pray

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