

Grace to You :: esp Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time

The Necessities for Effective Prayer

Scripture: Mark 11:22–25

Code: 41-58

Mark 11, Mark 11. Open your Bible to Mark's gospel and we're going to be looking at verses 22 to 25...verses 22 to 25 in Mark chapter 11.

We know we're in the Passion Week of Christ. He has entered into the city of Jerusalem on Monday. On Tuesday He came in and attacked and assaulted the temple. And by the time we come to our text in verse 22, it is Wednesday...Wednesday. On the next day, Thursday will be the Passover meal, on Friday the crucifixion, on Sunday the resurrection. So these are the last days of our Lord's life and ministry.

Now the subject of our verses, verses 22 to 25, and we'll actually back up to verse 20 so we get the flow, the subject here is prayer...prayer. And you might think that this is a kind of an odd place to do a lesson on prayer. It might seem to you that there could be other more pertinent things to talk about, given what is coming with the Lord dying, rising, ascending, and all that's bound up in that. But this lesson is absolutely critical and it's critical at this juncture.

Now nothing that our Lord says here is new. Everything He says here He has said somewhere else, probably many times not recorded. In the 24/7 three year experience of these disciples with Jesus, He repeated these things over and over again. This is very familiar. But it's also familiar to us because the things we're going to be reading are also elsewhere previously in the gospel accounts.

Why now? Why a lesson on prayer? Well it's really pretty simple if you just think about it. For three years, the disciples had lived in the presence of God Himself, God in human flesh. Anything they needed, He provided. It would seem to me that though they were raised to pray, synagogue life was full of prayers, though they were no doubt taught as children to pray, the Jews prayed cycles of prayers all day every day, prayer would have been a very, very formidable part of their upbringing and their... certainly their adult life would have followed the way they had been raised. But it seems to me that when they were with Jesus, it had a diminishing effect on their prayer life for the simple reason that why would you go to God hoping to be heard when you could grab Jesus by the arm and know you were heard? And everything that they needed came directly from His hand. When they needed protection, He provided that. When they needed direction, He provided that. When they needed food, He provided that. When they needed wisdom, He provided that.

Now the reason I think their prayer life diminished is because of that obvious reality that He was there to provide everything they need and because whenever there was a critical prayer meeting, they fell asleep...just not a pressing experience, I guess. But things were going to change and they were going to change dramatically. They were going to go from having the Son of God there within arm's reach, to not having Him there at all. This is a massive shift for them to handle.

For us, all we've ever known is prayer, right? We've never had Jesus around. No matter what it is that we desire from God, it always goes up in the form of prayer. That's all we've ever had. The only

access we've ever had is prayer. When we heard the gospel, we prayed to be saved. When we struggle with temptation, we pray to be delivered. When we need something, we pray to have provision. When we want wisdom, we ask of God. All we've ever known is prayer, prayer is our lifeline, prayer is the air we breathe, it's our oxygen

But not so with them. They're going to become like us, totally dependent on one whom they cannot see and they need to know that the same power and the same resources are available and accessible to them that were available and accessible when He was present. This is a dramatic alteration of their lives.

And this text at this time in this week tells us how important the lesson is to learn that all of heaven's resources are at the disposal of the believer who prays. What a great lesson. And what a great promise. How astonishing is God? How good is He? How gracious is He to make such an amazing, amazing provision?

Let's read the text, verse 20. It is Wednesday morning. Passion Week, they're passing by on their way into Jerusalem from Bethany, two miles away the home of Mary, Martha and Lazarus, the little family where Jesus and His Apostles stayed during this week. They're coming in to the city of Jerusalem in the morning. They saw the fig tree withered from the roots up.

Now if you were with us last time, you know what's behind this. The day before, Tuesday, they came into the city and we see what happens in verse 12. They left Bethany, Jesus was hungry, probably missed breakfast because He was praying. Seeing at a distance a fig tree and leaf, He went to see if perhaps He would find anything on it. And when He came to it, He found nothing but leaves for it was not the season for figs. He said to it, "May no one ever eat fruit from you again." And His disciples were listening.

What is that? He sees a fig tree. Fig tree is a symbol of Israel. He's hungry. He goes to the fig tree looking for fruit because fruit always came before leaves, even though it was immature fruit and it was edible. And He finds leaves but no fruit and He curses the fig tree. And Matthew says, "It died instantly...it literally died instantly."

They didn't know that. He cursed it. They passed by and went into the city, into the temple, spent the day in Jerusalem. By the time they left, it was dark, dusk. They passed the fig tree surely but couldn't see it in the dark. They didn't know it had withered, but now Wednesday morning, they come back and they see in the morning sun that it's dead from the roots up. That is a parable of divine judgment on the temple and on apostate Judaism and upon the nation of unbelieving Jews, they're going to be judged. Devastating judgment is coming. That's the parable of the fig tree.

Then He goes to the temple and assaults the place, another prediction, another preview of the coming judgment 40 years later when the Romans came and smashed that temple that had been being built for 84 years, they smashed it to the ground and Mark 13:2 says there wasn't one stone left on top of another stone, after 84 years of construction. Judaism is being judged, the temple is being judged, the nation is being judged for its unbelief.

So it's Wednesday morning now and they come in, verse 22, being reminded as they pass the fig tree with the death, obviously having overtaken all of it from the roots up, being reminded, Peter said

to Him, “Rabbi, look, the fig tree which You cursed has withered.”

“Jesus answered saying to them, ‘Have faith in God. Truly I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, be ye taken up and cast into the sea and doesn’t doubt in his heart but believes that what he says is going to happen, it will be granted him. Therefore I say to you, all things for which you pray and ask, believe that you have received them and they will be granted to you. Whenever you stand praying, forgive if you have anything against anyone so that your Father who is in heaven will also forgive you your transgressions.’” That’s where the original text ends. Later on in history, some scribe added verse 26, borrowed from Matthew 6:15, “A true statement,” that doesn’t appear in the earlier manuscripts here, “Neither will your Father who is in heaven forgive your transgressions.” I’ll comment on that later.

Now at first it seems like a bit of an awkward transition, doesn’t it, from Peter’s comment, the fig tree cursed is withered, to boom...have faith in God, and a discussion of prayer. What’s the connection? What’s the connection?

Well the connection and the message here, first of all, is that judgment is coming and the cursing of the fig tree was a demonstration of the power of judgment, just as Jesus by a word could kill a tree, roots and all, the power of God was a formidable reality. And I told you last time, this is the first destructive miracle in the gospels, all the rest are constructive...casting out demons, healing diseases, raising dead people, feeding multitudes, stopping storms, all those are beneficial, all those are positive. This is the only negative miracle but it is, nonetheless, a display of power...a display of power. It is not an impetuous act of frustration by Jesus cause He’s mad at the tree because He’s hungry, it is simply an opportunity for Him to make a clear analogy of what is going to happen to the temple.

But how does that segue way into, “Have faith in God.”? The answer is this, in Matthew 21:20 it records, and it’s a parallel account to this, that Peter also asked the question, it says there, “Rabbi, look, the fig tree which You cursed has withered.” Then Peter said this, “How did the fig tree immediately wither away?” It’s not how, I have no idea. It’s how does that kind of power work? Wow, he’s startled. He’s seen thousands of positive miracles. This is the first thing he’s seen like this. He’s startled that it is dead. How...how does this...how does this happen? How does this happen?

The temple was nothing but leaves, there was nothing there. There was no reality. There was no spiritual fruit. It was an empty pretense. And so the power is displayed in a negative way. But the very display of that power that killed that tree is in itself a demonstration of divine power, if not for blessing as they had seen so many times for judgment, it is nonetheless a demonstration of divine power. And it is at that point when Peter says, “How does this happen?” that Jesus says, answering him, verse 22, “Have faith in God.” In other words, such power displays, be they negative or positive, come from God...come from God.

And then He begins to talk about how to draw down divine power...how to draw down divine power. They’re going to need to know this. As I said, they had Jesus around all the time. How are they going to draw on divine power like that when He’s not around?

There are five components here, five elements, five necessities for powerful prayer, effective prayer, okay? I’m going to show them to you. Five elements, necessities, features of powerful prayer. Some

are implicit and some are explicit. Let's start with the first one.

First of all, powerful, effective prayer has a historical component. Okay? It has a historical component. What do you mean by that?

Well let's look back at this one little brief incident as kind of an insight into that. Peter says, "The fig tree which You cursed has withered." He is saying, I have seen the display of Your power. The historical component is to remember, is to remember, being reminded or remembering, Peter said, "Wow! The Fig tree You cursed has withered."

The historical foundation of an effective prayer life is to understand that God has put His power on display in the past and you're aware of it. They didn't realize that the fig tree withered immediately when He cursed it the day before. They just didn't see it till 24 hours later. Peter is startled, "How does this happen, such power?" And he remembers the display of power. That's where all effective prayer begins, with some sense of God's past power displays. Why would you call on the Lord now if He hadn't proven Himself in the past?

When the children of Israel came to the promised land in Deuteronomy and they were about to enter the promised land after all their years in Egypt and then forty years of wandering in the wilderness, the book of Deuteronomy was given, the second law, the law is repeated to set them in order before they go into the land to possess it, and fifteen times in that book of Deuteronomy we read, "You shall remember...You shall remember...You shall remember." You're going to go in there, you're going to face formidable opposition, you're going to face all kinds of problems, you're going into a foreign land, you're going to conquer the land, you're going to kill the people, you're going to take over the land, there's going to be all kinds of obstacles and all kinds of opportunities, you need to remember. You need to remember.

Remember what? Remember the God who reserved you, remember the God who delivered you out of Egypt, remember the God who rescued you from the death angel at the Passover, remember the God who let you walk through the water untouched and then drowned all of Pharaoh's army, remember the God who fed you manna in the wilderness, remember the God who provided water from a rock, remember, remember, remember, remember. That is the foundation of effective prayer now and in the future.

And I will just tell you this, the more you remember, the stronger your confidence in God. People who are new in the faith, who don't have the history of what God has done in the past, either in scriptural history, church history, or personal history are at a disadvantage from those of us who have been around a long time praying and seeing God answer. There are some advantages of being old, and that's one of them. I've lived to see the mighty hand of God in answered prayer more times than I could ever, ever, ever count. And it happens all the time to me...all the time. I said, "Lord, I have a busy schedule coming up, I have to go on a trip and I'm going to be all over the place, I think I have six or seven flights in a brief period of days, I'm going here, going there, speaking here, speaking there and I was anticipating the home going of Sam, my friend, and if there's anyway, Lord, that You can get me there, I want to be there for that." Oh it just so happened that they didn't know anything about my schedule but he went to be with the Lord and they called and said, this is when his funeral is, one o'clock in the afternoon... Oh, really, that one day is the only day that I just happened to be flying over Washington D.C. so I can land, do the funeral, get back on the thing and go where I needed to go.

These are not coincidences They don't have any idea about my schedule. God keeps my schedule. This is my life. It's really fun to live this way. I mean, it's absolutely sanctified fun, glorious. You know, the prophet Isaiah says, "Remember...remember...remember," it's a great passage in Isaiah 46, "Remember...remember there's no God like Me, remember, I know the end from the beginning." Psalm 77, Psalm 78, Psalm 105. Psalm 143, on and on it goes. One of the components of worship is to recite the deeds which God has done because that's fuel for worship, isn't it? Peter remembered. That's just a little glimpse of that and it's only implied there, but the truth is the same. We start with an active, powerful, effective prayer life when we have confidence in the revelation of God's answers to prayer in the past. The more you know about the Old Testament, the more you know about redemptive history, the more you know about the New Testament, the more you know about the history of the church...I love to study history because I love to see how God displayed His power in such mighty ways through choice and faithful servants, cause that...that anchors my own confidence that He hears and answers prayer. So the historical element is to remember and the more you have to remember biblically, historically, and personally, the stronger the foundation of your confidence in prayer.

Secondly, there's a theological component. The theological component to prayer and we see that in verse 22, "Jesus answered saying to them, He's including all the Apostles and disciples that are there, 'Have faith in God.'" That's the first clear statement with reference to prayer...Have faith in God.

Now the point here is not about faith. It's about God. This is the theological element of prayer and what it means is trust God...trust God. Matthew 21, a parallel passage, adds, "Have faith in God and don't doubt."

It's not the nature of faith here that is the issue. It's the character of God that is the issue. Another way to say it, "Trust God." I will tell you, look, if you want to have an effective prayer life, you must trust God. You must trust His power, but you also must trust His purpose and His promise and His plans and His will. In other words, you have to trust that He knows better than you do, trust God, trust God.

In the disciples prayer when the disciples said, "Lord, teach us to pray," He said, "Pray this way. Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be Your name. Your Kingdom come, Your will be done." That's how you pray. "God, whatever honors Your name, advances Your Kingdom, and accomplishes Your will, that's what I pray." That's how you really pray.

The other way to pray is to pray to consume it your own lusts, on your own desires, to demand things from God. And James says, "You ask and you don't receive because you ask to consume it on your own desires." All prayer starts with Your honor, Your Kingdom, Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. That's what it means to trust God.

First John 5:14 essentially says that. And these are familiar verses to all of us, but I need to remind us of them. "This is the confidence which we have before Him that if we ask anything according to...what?...His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests which we've asked of Him." If you ask in His will, you're going to receive what you ask. If you ask to consume it on your own lusts, you're not going to receive it. In fact, James also

tells us in James 4:15, "We ought to say if the Lord wills we will do this or that." In John 14:13 and 14 it says, "Whatever you ask...Jesus says, whatever you ask...and this will be next Thursday night in the Upper Room...whatever you ask in My name, I will do it that the Father may be glorified in the Son...in My name, consistent with My person, consistent with My purpose, consistent with My plan, consistent with My will, consistent with My Kingdom."

So, the historical necessity in prayer is to remember. The theological necessity in prayer is to trust God, to submit to God. A couple of illustrations of that. Philippians chapter 1, Paul is a prisoner here which was not a happy experience, very primitive horrific circumstances. He says in verse 12 of Philippians 1, "I want you to know, brethren, that my circumstances have turned out for the greater progress of the gospel so that my imprisonment in the cause of Christ has become well known through the whole praetorian guard and everyone else." And then this, "And most of the brethren trusting in the Lord because of my imprisonment have far more courage to speak the Word of God without fear."

That's a great statement. Others are trusting in the Lord that even if they end up in prison, it's going to end up for the furtherance of the gospel as my imprisonment has. The operative phrase here, "trusting in the Lord." That's what we're talking about. When Jesus says, "Have faith in God," He's saying, "Trust the Lord....trust the Lord." Nothing...nothing could be better and more secure than that.

Listen to 1 Peter 4:19. "Those who suffer according to the will of God shall entrust their souls to a faithful Creator."

Trust God, trust your life to Him, trust your circumstances to Him. The believer who prays with a great sense of history, and understands the power of God, the believer who prays with a great sense of trust and understands that the best of all things is the will of God, unleashes heaven's power.

This is so important for these men to learn because life was going to take a dramatic, dramatic turn. I would never tell God what I want, demand from God what I want, corner God. I just want what He knows is right and true and good and best.

There's a spiritual component to add to the historical component and theological component. Pretty simple, verse 23, a spiritual component, "Truly I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, 'Be taken up and cast into the sea,' and doesn't doubt in his heart, but believes...there's the operative word, that what he says is going to happen, it will be granted him."

What is the spiritual component? Believe...believe. You know, that is an amazing verse. Truly, that's emphatically letting us know that in spite of the fact that this seems too much, too outlandish, too outrageous, too over the top, too much to give, too much to offer, too big, it's true. This is exactly what God means...truly. And it's Jesus saying it personally, "I say to you, 'Whoever....I like that, don't you? I see me in there somewhere and all of you....Whoever.'" And here comes this illustration, "Whoever says to this mountain..." Now people have written pages and pages on what mountain it is. Really. It could be a hypothetical mountain, but since He's standing on a mountain, maybe it's the mountain He's standing on. Some people think it's the Mount of Olives. I don't know, maybe it is the Mount of Olives, maybe it's the Temple Mount, whatever mountain He's pointing to, it doesn't really matter, it's just the general principle, "Whoever says to this mountain, 'Be taken up, or lifted up, and hurled into the sea,'" That's a pretty big order. "And doesn't doubt in his heart but believes that what

he says is going to happen, it will be granted him.”

Now you wouldn't take that literally, would you? I mean, you could test it, if you want, I really don't think it's going to work. You can go stand in front of any mountain you choose, even a small one, and it's not likely to get up into the air and go out over the ocean. Nor did Jesus ever do anything like that in His life and ministry.

What in the world is this? This is simply an analogy, this is hyperbole, nothing more than that. In other words, it's part of their understanding of how illustrations develop, so of traditionally. If you read the Babylonian Talmud which has a lot of Jewish sayings in it, rabbis are identified there who could solve severe problems as movers of mountains, or rooters up of mountains.

We might say about a person who is a formidable person, “That person can move mountains,” and we know what that means. We know exactly what that means. Well there were no less figures of speech in the biblical languages and in the biblical times then there are today. This is talking about really difficult things, hard things. I remember as a boy, my father used to say to me, “You can make a mountain out of a mole hill.” You probably said something like that. You don't literally mean that, that's just a figure of speech and that's what this is. There may be some serious issue, some severe issue confronting you, some grave concern that doesn't seem to have a human solution. If you will not...look at the verse, 23...doubt, one who doesn't doubt in his heart down deep, but believes that what he says is going to happen, it will be granted him.”

Wow, doubt will not serve you well because who are you doubting? You're doubting God. Now remember this, folks. You hear all this stuff today about the faith movement where it's your faith that has the power. That's not true. That's a lie. Your faith has no power and your words spoken in faith have zero power. That is a deception. God has all the power. Your faith is only a way to activate God's power within the framework of His purpose.

Listen to James 1, however. The doubt here is not doubting your own faith. You hear that, you know, these TV preachers, you know, you can't doubt the power of your words. You can't doubt the power of your faith.

You better doubt the power of your faith and you better doubt the power of your words because they're impotent. The power is with God. We're not talking about doubting you, we're talking about doubting Him. Don't do that. James 1:6, “He must ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind.” Just blown all over the place if you doubt. “For that man ought not to expect that he will receive anything from the Lord because he's a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.”

The issue here is whether you believe God, or whether you doubt God. Don't doubt. Believe and believe that what He says is going to happen and it will be granted him. This is calling for faith...faith in the power of God, faith in the power of God to do this, faith in the goodness of God, faith in the wisdom of God.

Now let me give you an illustration. You say, “How much faith do I have to have to activate this?” Well let's look at Matthew 14 for a minute...Matthew 14, and we'll go to verse 29. Peter got out of the boat and walked on the water. Came toward Jesus, then he saw the circumstances. Saw the wind,

became frightened, began to sink and said, "Lord, save me. Immediately Jesus stretched out His hand, took hold of Him and said to Him, 'You of...how much faith?...little faith, why do you doubt?'"

Wow. Jesus heard his prayer. You know what the key principle here is? Little faith is enough...little faith is enough...little faith is enough. There's a threshold there. Did Peter have great, stupendous sweeping faith? No. He had little faith. But he was granted his prayer even though his faith was small...little faith.

Look at Mark 9 and I'll show you another illustration. Kind of build an understanding of what we're talking about here when we're talking about faith, how much faith. Mark 9 verse 14, The disciples and Jesus meet and when Jesus comes back to the disciples from His transfiguration, there are some scribes arguing with them. One in the crowd, verse 17, says, "Teacher, I brought You my son, possessed with the spirit which makes him mute." This is a demon-possessed boy. "Whenever it seizes him, it slams him to the ground, he foams at the mouth, grinds his teeth, stiffens out. I told Your disciples to cast it out, they couldn't do it...couldn't do it. And He answered them and said, 'O unbelieving people.'"

Peter could walk on water because he had little faith. They couldn't do anything for this boy because they had no faith. They didn't even have enough faith as the father of the boy. "They brought the boy to Jesus...verse 20...when he saw him, immediately the spirit threw him into a convulsion. Falling to the ground he began rolling around foaming at the mouth and He asked his father, Jesus did, 'How long has this been happening to him.' and he said, 'From childhood. It's thrown him both into the fire and into the water to destroy him. But if You can do anything, take pity on us and help us.' And Jesus said to him, 'If You can? You haven't heard about Me?' And the boy's father cries out, 'I do believe, help my...what?...unbelief.'"

It's always going to be faith mixed with some doubt. We don't have perfect faith, do we? You were saved by faith, true? Was it a perfect faith? A hundred percent, to the max, to the wall, to the limit, no shadow of doubt? No. You live by faith, you walk by faith...is it a perfect faith, is it a supreme faith, ultimate faith? No. But there's a threshold at which no faith becomes little faith and little faith, "I believe, help my unbelief." is enough to activate the power of God.

Is that good news? Is that good news? Yes. I think it's great news because we all live there. I mean, we're human and we're walking by sight and struggling with faith.

In Matthew 6 He says you have little faith because they didn't believe in His provision. In Matthew 8 He says, you have little faith because they didn't trust Him in the storm. In Matthew 14 He says they have little faith because of the incident again on the water. In Matthew 16 they have little faith because they don't believe that He can provide and supply for the crowd. I mean, they just constantly had little faith. Little faith...needs elements that are humanly manageable. You know, when they had the clothes and the food and the calm seas and the visible resources and Jesus was there, they had little faith. But when He's leaving now, they were going to need more than that.

Just exactly how much faith is this? Oh, according to Matthew 17:20, it's the faith the size of a grain of mustard seed. That is more good news...more good news. Faith isn't the power, faith is the empty hand that receives the power from God. And they needed to learn this. They were going to have to at least get their faith up to the size of a grain of mustard seed because in Matthew 17:20 Jesus

actually said the same thing, "If you have faith the size of a grain of mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Be removed' and it will be removed." Even a small amount of struggling faith can draw down the power of God in the life of a believer. What an amazing promise. Is that not grace upon grace upon grace upon grace? So, the spiritual component is to believe.

Fourthly, a practical component...practical. Historical, remember...theological, trust...spiritual believe...practical....verse 24, this should be obvious. "Therefore I say to you, all things for which you pray and ask..." There's the word, the practical component of effectual, practical prayer is ask...ask. James says, "You have not because you ask not." Ask. "Believe that you have received," That speaks of something in the future as if it's already happened. "Believe that you have received them, these all things for which you ask, and they will be granted you."

Wait a minute. That is shockingly magnanimous. That's why He says, "I say to you," this is personal from Me, all things. All things? "All things for which you pray and ask? All things?" That's what He says.

You know, this must have reminded them of the Sermon on the Mount, the truths of which He repeated often, ask and it shall be given to you, seek and you will find, knock and it shall be opened to you, for everyone who asks, receives and he who seeks finds. And to him who knocks it will be opened. For what man is there among you who when his son asks for a loaf gives him a stone, or if he asks for a fish, he'll not give him a snake, will he? If you then being evil know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give what is good to those who ask Him? Ask and believe that you have already received and it will be granted.

Wait a minute...wait a minute. This sounds like a Charismatic's dream come true. This is just too unqualified here. This is way too unqualified. And that's why we bring in James 4:3, "You ask and you don't receive because you ask to consume it on your own desires."

The Bible is clear on the qualifications, whatever is according to His will, whatever is according to His will. The beautiful model for that, Mark 14:36, our Lord in the garden, sweating, as it were, great drops of blood in anticipation of His own crucifixion, cries out, "Abba, Father, all things are possible for You. Remove this cup from Me, this cup of coming suffering, sin bearing. Yet not what I will, but what You will."

The Lord understands our cries. He understands the cry for healing. He understands the cry for a better marriage. He understands the cry of the heart over the children that grieve You and just torture You with their disaffection and their rebellion. He understands that. He understands the struggles with money and finances and He understands all that. He understands all that and He holds you in His heart and He will never forsake You and He will never withhold any good thing from you and all things will work together for your good if you faithfully ask.

But at the end, you can pour out your heart to Him, you can storm heaven but always with this qualifying statement, "Nevertheless, not my will, but Your be done." Why? His is greater, purer, wiser, more generous, more gracious, more merciful than anything you can ever, ever imagine.

The Lord makes all of this even more clear in the Upper Room the next night. Again John 14:12, "Truly, truly I say to you, he that believes in Me, the works that I do, He will do also in greater works,

greater in extent not kind, than these He will do because I go to My Father. Whatever you ask in My name, that will I do so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask anything in My name, I will do it." That doesn't mean you can ask anything and then say "In Jesus name" at the end. That's not the point. It's not words, it's consistent with who He is, His name is who He is, consistent with His person and His purpose.

In that Upper Room, there was so much instruction, John 13 all the way through John 16. In chapter 15 verse 6, "If anyone doesn't abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch, dries up..and so forth." But verse 7, "If you abide in Me and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish and it will be done for you." Ask whatever you wish. If My words abide in you and if you abide in Me, who's controlling your wish list? He is...He is.

Verse 16 of John 15, "You didn't choose Me but I chose you and appointed you that you would go and bear fruit. Your fruit would remain so that whatever you ask of My Father in My name, He may give it to you." And then in the sixteenth chapter, that same Upper Room on Thursday night, "In that day you will not question Me about anything. Truly, truly I say to you, if you ask the Father for anything in My name, He will give it to you. Until now you have asked for nothing in My name. Ask and you will receive that your joy may be made full."

They hadn't been praying because He was there. Up to now you hadn't been doing this. Now you've got to do this. You ask, but you ask consistent with Me, who I am, why I came, My purpose. It's always the qualifier...always.

There's one final necessity in effective, powerful prayer. There's a historical component to remember, a theological component to trust, spiritual component to believe, a practical component to ask and, by the way, we aren't close to exhausting these things, they're all through Scripture. Then there's a moral component, number five, there's a moral component here that must be stated in our final minutes and it is in verse 25. And by the way, verse 25 is drawn out of Matthew 6:14, the words of Jesus in the Disciples' prayer, the Our Father. It is drawn out of Matthew 6, it is actually a parallel to verse 14. Verse 15 says what verse 26 says, but in your Bible you notice some brackets normally around 26. It doesn't appear in the earlier manuscripts. The scribe put it in, maybe he put it in accidentally cause he was referring to Matthew 6 and just kind of copied the whole thing down since in the early manuscripts didn't have verse markings. Verse 26 is a true statement that doesn't appear in the early manuscripts of this passage, so we assume Mark didn't include it. It did include verse 25, "Whenever stand praying," and by the way, standing was the most common posture for prayer, standing...that's right. Lying down was another posture for prayer, as kneeling was another posture. You see that all throughout Scripture. But the most common was standing, such as in Matthew 6:5, Luke 18:9 through 14 gives is an illustration of that.

"But when you stand praying, here comes the moral requirement...forgive...forgive. If you have anything against anyone so that your Father who is in heaven will also forgive you your transgressions."

Wow! If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Old Testament says, the Lord will not hear me. So I've got to deal with the sin in my heart. That could be a long process. If when I want to pray to the Lord, I've got to get rid of all the sin in my life, that could be a long, drawn-out process because I'm never going to be what I ought to be and there's always going to be sin lurking somewhere there. So the Lord just says, "Let me make it simple for you. Forgive...forgive. If you have anything against anyone, hurl it

away.” That’s what the word “forgive,” *aphiemi* means, hurl it away, get rid of it. “So that your Father who is in heaven will also forgive you your transgressions.”

This isn’t talking about salvation. We’ve already had the judicial forgiveness of salvation. This is talking about the sins that are part of your life as a believer that stand between you and the Lord. The difference is in John 13, you remember, where Jesus said to Peter, “You have been bathed, you have been washed, you just need your feet cleaned.” We’ve had the big bath. We’ve been cleansed through faith, as we read in Acts 15, but we collect the dirt of the world, sin, as we live day by day. And if we want those to be forgiven, which opens the way to pray because if those aren’t forgiven, we don’t have access to pray, if we want those to be forgiven us, then we have to forgive others. That’s exactly what Jesus said in the Disciples’ prayer, that’s Matthew 6:14 and 15. And maybe I ought to make sure that you look at it in that context, “Forgive us our debts as we have forgiven our debtors, but if you forgive others for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. If you don’t forgive others, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions.”

I don’t know about you, but I don’t want to have unforgiven sin in my life, not in the eternal sense, not in the judicial sense, not the salvation sense, but in the sense of interrupting my fellowship and my usefulness in my prayer life.

Jesus gave an illustration of this when in Matthew 18 He told the story about the man who owed the king an unpayable debt and the king forgave him the debt. And then the man who had been forgiven an unpayable debt went out and found a guy who owed him a small amount and strangled him and threw him in debtors prison and he was disciplined by the king for receiving a massive level of forgiveness and being unwilling to give a small amount to somebody else. You can’t accept the full forgiveness of God and then be unforgiving towards somebody else. So here’s the moral component in effective prayer...forgive if you have anything against anyone.

Here’s your choice. Hold a grudge or have your prayers answered. Take your pick. Hold a grudge, feel vengeance or have your prayers answered. Ephesians 4:32, “Forgiving one another even as God for Christ’s sake has forgiven us.” We need the attitude of Stephen, “Lord, lay not this sin to their charge.”

This is a massive promise, life-changing promise, isn’t it? Whatever we ask in His will, in His purpose, in His plan, that’s not...that shouldn’t be foreign to us. Look, salvation is a sovereign work of God but not apart from our faith. Sanctification is a sovereign work of the Spirit of God in us but not apart from our faith. And praying, and pulling down the power of heaven is bringing to earth the sovereign purpose and will of God but it’s activated in the same way those other things are activated by, our faith. I think they got the message.

Turn to the book of Acts, chapter 1. A few weeks later, Jesus is back in heaven. He’s gone. He leaves in verse 9, Acts 1. Verse 12, “They were out on the Mount of Olives when He left. They went right back into Jerusalem from the Mount, same day, same hour. They entered the city and they went to the Upper Room. Peter, James, John, Andrew, Philip, Thomas, Bartholomew, Matthew, James, son of Alphaeus, Simon the Zealot, Judas, the son of James, these all with one mind were continually devoting themselves to...guess what?...prayer. He was gone and within hours of His leaving, they began to tap divine resources. With them were the women, Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers who had come to faith.” There were 120 of them there praying.

And guess what? The power came down. On the Day of Pentecost, chapter 2, the place was suddenly hit by heaven, suddenly there came from heaven a noise, verse 2, like a violent rushing wind and it filled the whole house where they were sitting and there appeared to them tongues as of fire, distributing themselves and they rested on each one of them and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other languages as the Spirit was giving them utterance and they went from there to the great moment on the Day of Pentecost and three thousand were saved and then another time five thousand were saved, and there were twenty-thousand plus soon that believed the gospel and the gospel literally went out so powerfully that the people said they turned the world upside down that fast. And the Lord was saying to them by that answered prayer, "I told you that the power for the purposes of God would be available if you sought Me by prayer." And if you go through the book of Acts, it is prayer and power, prayer and power, prayer and power, prayer and power, and that's how it's gone through the history of the church and it's still that way. So make a choice. Hold a grudge or bring down heaven's power. It's your choice.

What a promise. Still our privilege to call on the Lord in believing prayer, consistent with His will and purpose, and that's all we would want anyway. And He does it. So, my beloved, I give you the words of the Apostle Paul, this is such good news, I suggest that you pray without ceasing.

Father, thank You for our time this morning. How wonderfully rich and blessed we have been. Thank You for these precious people, what a blessed congregation, what a joy and privilege to minister to them. What receptive hearts, open minds, loving attitudes toward You and toward Your Word and even toward Me and those who serve them, teach them. Thank You that the work that Your Holy Spirit has done here by faith. Lord, I pray that You'll increase our faith, that our faith will grow and increase and grow stronger and that the result of that faith will be believing prayer. And, Lord, we would never want to short-circuit that, never want to short-circuit that by holding a grudge. Fill our hearts with forgiveness no matter what others have done for us. Forgiveness is free to give, free to offer, instant and immediate and it opens up the power of heaven. Whether or not there's reconciliation down the road, that's another issue, but forgiveness, may we give that instantaneously and always so that our prayers are not hindered. Hear our prayer, Lord, and hear the prayer that we cry to You, first of all, forgive our transgressions and then grant us the faith to activate heaven's power on behalf of the advance of Your name and Your Kingdom, and Your will on earth as it is in heaven. Thank You for that privilege. In the name of Christ, we pray. Amen.

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