

Prayer: Exercising His Authority

Growing Faith, Session 5

Warm-up Question: Can you recall a situation when you felt you were in danger and God intervened to keep you from harm? If you cannot think of a personal incident, do you know of such an incident occurring to a family member or friend? Share your stories.

The day was September 11, 2001. Sujo John was working on the 81st floor of the World Trade Center One when the plane hit. Flames burst through his office as Sujo and his co-workers dashed for the stairwell. Feeling the building swaying and tilting to the left, Sujo thought that he would die. He feared the worst for his pregnant wife who worked in the Second World Trade Center building. He made frantic calls to her without success. During his one hour descent, another explosion rocked the building as the second plane hit the building where Mary worked. Unknown to Sujo, his wife had reached work a little late and was not allowed to enter. "We were standing right beneath the buildings and I was trying to call him on my cell phone," Mary said. "I kept hitting the redial button, the cell phones weren't working and the call wouldn't go through. And while I was still standing there the second plane came and struck the second building. I saw it. I was standing right under the buildings. I felt the heat, and the debris falling all around me." Hysterical, Mary spent all of that morning calling out to God to protect her husband, promising him something in return. "One of my prayers was, 'Lord if you help him out of that building and by some chance he's able to make it out, then I'm ready to give up everything we have right now, our jobs, whatever else we have.' We'll go to a third world country. We'll serve you for the rest of our lives," she said. Meanwhile Sujo had reached the lowest level of Tower One at the same time as building two was collapsing forcing Sujo to stand against a wall with twenty others. In that moment, Sujo said he was prompted to do something that he'd never done before. "I felt the Lord was saying, 'Where are these people that are huddled with you going?' And I started crying out, 'Jesus,'" Sujo said. "I wasn't sure what I was to expect. Almost immediately, these people started calling upon the name of the Lord. I heard them call the name of the Lord with me. Picture this building going down with a tremendous roar, but for me, what is etched in my mind is not really the roar of the building going down, but the cry of these

people reaching out to the eternal God."

Surrounded in darkness, Sujo thought that he had been buried alive. He was able to pull himself up, but all twenty of those around him had perished. Choking on ash and blinded by debris, a flashlight drew Sujo to an FBI agent who was lying face down. Miraculously, a flashing red light from a crushed ambulance directed the two men to safety. Covered with white soot; they walked out of the debris together, saying the name Jesus. Feeling sure that his wife and unborn baby were dead, he said: "Cell phones weren't working all of that day because those towers had those communications equipment. But a call comes through—the first call that would come through that day. My cell phone rings. I pick up the phone seeing my wife's caller ID, and I'm thinking 'It's not her. Someone else has gotten a hold of her phone to reach me with the news, hey, your wife is dead.' I pick up the call. It's my wife - so it was an incredible moment to hear that that my wife is alive." Today, still etched in Sujo's memory are the people who perished while he survived and the call on his life to tell others about the name that will take them to heaven. "I see lost people around me," he said. "Watching people die on 9/11 has totally changed my life." Since those frightening hours, Sujo and Mary have been traveling the world sharing their incredible story of survival - something that has turned into a full-time evangelistic ministry with more than 30,000 decisions for Christ. "Now looking back, it's five years," he said. "God has taken us to more than 400 cities around the world where I've traveled with the greatest story ever told of God who offers his unconditional love for His people."¹

Survivors of life threatening encounters often credit their survival to prayer. How bad do things have to get before you call on the Lord in prayer? Try and rate yourself (1-10).

Do you pray at the slightest need or anxiety? (10) Or do you rarely even think of prayer when a situation crops up? (1)

Is Everything that Happens God's Will?

During the eight year war between Iran and Iraq in the

¹ <http://www.cbn.com/cbnnews/229035.aspx>

1980's, the leaders of Iran sent thousands of their children, some as young as twelve years old to their deaths as suicide squads. Following, is an excerpt from an article written by Matthias Kuntzel:

During the Iran-Iraq War, the Ayatollah Khomeini imported 500,000 small plastic keys from Taiwan. The trinkets were meant to be inspirational. After Iraq invaded in September 1980, it had quickly become clear that Iran's forces were no match for Saddam Hussein's professional, well-armed military. To compensate for their disadvantage, Khomeini sent Iranian children, some as young as twelve years old, to the front lines. There, they marched in formation across minefields toward the enemy, clearing a path with their bodies. Before every mission, one of the Taiwanese keys would be hung around each child's neck. It was supposed to open the gates to paradise for them.²

These children who rolled to their deaths were part of the Basiji, a mass volunteer movement created by Khomeini in 1979 and militarized after the war started in order to supplement his beleaguered army. They went enthusiastically, and by the thousands, to their own destruction. "The young men cleared the mines with their own bodies," one veteran of the Iran-Iraq War recalled in 2002 to the German newspaper Frankfurter Allgemeine. "It was sometimes like a race. Even without the commander's orders, everyone wanted to be first." When asked why they sacrificed their young in such a way, the Iranian response was that if they died at the hands of the mines or Iraqi bullets it was Allah's will.

Although it seems apparent to us that sending children to clear the way for soldiers by using their own bodies as mine fodder is an appalling and evil concept, the men who trained children for this purpose and sent them to their deaths justified it by believing that the children were being sent to heaven. That is why the children went willingly. They believed that whatever happens is Allah's will, and so it is Allah's will that they should give their lives in this way.

Que Sera Sera?

In the 1950's, Doris Day sung a popular song called, Que Sera Sera, (Whatever will be will be). Are all things that happen God's will?

Some people think that since God knows everything that is going to happen and allows it all to take place, that

all things that happen are God's will. "*Whatever will be, will be, the future's not ours to see, Que Sera Sera.*" If that is true then why should we pray? Can we really change things by prayer? Over the last few weeks we have been learning that God has given authority over the Earth to mankind and that God has chosen to work through men and women. We learned that Satan gained the upper hand over man by Adam's sin of disobedience to God's command and that the race of man lives under the authority of Satan, whom Jesus called the *prince of this world* in two different places (John 14:30 and 16:11). In another scripture Paul, the apostle, says that this world is under the dominion of Satan calling him, "the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient" (Ephesians 2:2). We also learned that Jesus came to share in our humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil—and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death (Hebrews 2:14-15). The authority that Satan had gained from Adam has now been won back by the Lord Jesus at the cross. Before His ascension to heaven, He said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit...." (Matthew 28:18-19).

If the book of Hebrews (2:14) is right in saying that Satan has been destroyed through the cross, how come he's still able to have an effect in our lives through temptation?

God has given authority to the Church to wield His power and overcome all the ground that the enemy still has under his dominion. We are to rescue that which is precious to our God. That which is precious to Him are people that he cares about, those who cannot yet see what God has done on their behalf. The enemy of their souls holds them from seeing the gospel:

² by setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God. ³ And even if our gospel is veiled, **it is veiled to those who are perishing.** ⁴ **The god of this age has blinded the minds** of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God (2 Corinthians 4:2-4 Emphasis mine).

² <http://www.matthiaskuntzel.de/contents/ahmadinejads-demons>.

Satan sows thought seeds into people's minds; he suggests thoughts of ridicule, or rejection, any kind of thought that would cause despair and separation from God and ultimately cause someone not to hear or not to accept the message of the gospel. Satan's aim is to steal, kill and destroy. We, the Church of the Living God (the word church literally means "the called out ones"), are called to enforce the legislation that is now against our enemy because of what happened at the cross, that he should release his captives to the will of God. God has given us authority to compel Satan through prayer and faith in God, to yield ground to the church.

The Need of the Hour—Those Who Will Pray

John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist church, once said, "God does nothing on the earth except in answer to believing prayer."

How much importance do you attach to John Wesley's statement? If you think that it is a true statement, why would God deliberately limit himself to only working through prayer? If you think that it is not a correct statement, please give your reasons why.

John Wesley bases his belief on several key scriptures that seem to indicate that God chooses to work on earth only in response to prayer. It is an interesting concept to consider. If this is true, it should certainly lead us to more impassioned prayer. Would God actually choose to limit Himself in this way and act only in partnership with men and women on earth? Let's look at two or three passages from the Bible:

²⁹ The people of the land practice extortion and commit robbery; they oppress the poor and needy and mistreat the alien, denying them justice. ³⁰ **"I looked for a man among them who would build up the wall and stand before me in the gap on behalf of the land so I would not have to destroy it, but I found none.** ³¹ So I will pour out my wrath on them and consume them with my fiery anger, bringing down on their own heads all they have done, declares the Sovereign LORD" (Ezekiel 22:29-31).

What are we to understand from this passage?

At that time in Israel's history, before the Babylonian captivity, God was angry with His people, because the poor, the needy, and those living in the land from other countries were being denied justice and being robbed by the people of the land, the Israelites. God says that

He looked for an intercessor, a man who would build up the gap in the wall. What is meant by the gap in the wall? The word picture is that of a walled city where the outside wall, the defense line, has been broken and is open and bare before an enemy who would pour through the gap and take the city. It speaks of the difference between how things should be and how they are. A man or woman of prayer was needed to stand in the gap and build up the wall, so that God would not have to destroy and pour out His wrath on them. Their sin as a nation had warranted disciplinary action by God. His obvious longing was to give mercy to the inhabitants of the land in answer to prayer, but there was no intercessor, no man or woman of prayer that would cry out for mercy for Israel. The passage concludes that God is forced to consume them with His fiery anger and give them the consequences of their actions.

What do you think would have happened if God would have found an intercessor to stand in the gap?

Here again, we see that God chooses to work in partnership with men through prayer. Even when He has determined to accomplish something, He searches for one who will pray, one who will stand in the gap. In the next passage we will look at, God needs an intercessor to bring about on earth something that He has already said He would do. In 1 Kings 17, the prophet Elijah is directed to tell Ahab, the King of Israel, that "there will be neither dew nor rain in the next few years except at my word (1 Kings 17:1). For three and a half years not a drop of rain fell on Israel, just as the prophet foretold. In the 18th chapter, Elijah is told by God, "Go and present yourself to Ahab, and I will send rain on the land." The passage of scripture then goes on to tell us of a challenge between the God of Elijah, the LORD, and the false prophets of Baal. The God that answers by fire is the real God. After a spectacular showing of God's power with fire coming down from heaven at Elijah's prayer, and the repentance of His people Israel, it is time for the rain to come according to the word of God. Elijah is then led to the top of Mount Carmel and has to pray in order for the Lord to answer, and the rain to come:

⁴¹ And Elijah said to Ahab, "Go, eat and drink, for there is the sound of a heavy rain." ⁴² So Ahab went off to eat and drink, but Elijah climbed to the top of Carmel, bent down to the ground and put his face between his knees.

⁴³ "Go and look toward the sea," he told his servant. And

he went up and looked. "There is nothing there," he said. Seven times Elijah said, "Go back."⁴⁴ The seventh time the servant reported, "A cloud as small as a man's hand is rising from the sea." So Elijah said, "Go and tell Ahab, 'Hitch up your chariot and go down before the rain stops you.'"⁴⁵ Meanwhile, the sky grew black with clouds, the wind rose, a heavy rain came on and Ahab rode off to Jezreel (1 Kings 18:41-45).

We are told that Elijah bent down to the ground with his face between his knees; some say that this is a common posture of birthing a baby in the Middle East. It is also a common posture for prayer and intercession. King Ahab had been fasting so Elijah tells him to go and eat and drink, and get ready for the rain that Elijah would birth into being by prayer. He knew that if he would pray, God would send the rain (Zechariah 10:1). Why should Elijah have to pray for something that God had already told him would happen? God had already told him that He would bring rain on the land, but still directed Elijah to pray until he saw evidence of the coming rain.

What would have happened if Elijah had not obeyed?

Why did he send his servant to check if there was a cloud yet? Why didn't he go himself?

Perhaps it speaks of his focus that his time in prayer must be kept from distraction.

What distracts you in any time of prayer?

We find that Elijah didn't get his answer without a trial of faith. It would have been very easy to give up praying when his servant had come back after the second or third try saying that there was no cloud. It was only at the seventh time that he sent his servant that a little cloud was seen in the sky. Knowing that his work was done, he got off his knees and went down from the top of Mount Carmel. The man of God prayed until he got the answer that God had already shown him earlier, that He would send rain. God revealed that His will was to bring rain, but it still had to be birthed into the physical realm by prayer. God needed a man to stand in the gap.

A similar theme is found in the Book of Daniel. Daniel and his people, the nation of Israel, were being disciplined by God using the hand of King Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon. He had deported the whole

nation of Israel several hundred miles away from their country to be slaves in Babylon for seventy years. The Jewish people's sin of idol worship along with many other sins of disobedience had displeased God to the point where He could stomach their sin no longer. Their punishment was not without hope though. He used the prophet Jeremiah to tell them that, "when seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfill my gracious promise to bring you back to this place (Jeremiah 29:10). When Daniel read the words of the prophet, he didn't just wait for it to happen, he knew that the time was now for him to stand in the gap and he started to pray the words into being:

"I, Daniel, understood from the scriptures, according to the word of the LORD given to Jeremiah the prophet, that the desolation of Jerusalem would last seventy years. So I turned to the LORD God and pleaded with him in prayer and petition, in fasting, and in sackcloth and ashes" (Daniel 9:2-3).

Daniel did not just sit and wait when he realized that the seventy year time of desolation was nearing the end, he began to plead for God to fulfill His word. Again we see that God has chosen mankind to be a partner with Him, to bring His will into being.

Share a time when you felt an urgent need to pray for someone else. What happened? (You can pass on this question if you do not want to answer.)

God is looking to His church, those who have been given the authority of Christ to be those who will bring God's will into being. He is using this time to train us. If we will not pray, God will not act. The problem is not on God's end, it is on our end. James, the half-brother of the Lord Jesus states in his letter, "**You do not have, because you do not ask God.** When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures" (James 4:2-3). If the church will not pray, God will not act. He has determined that He will only operate in this world through the prayers of His people.

E. M. Bounds, the great writer on the topic of prayer, once said:

"God shapes the world by prayer. The more praying there is in the world the better the world will be, the mightier the forces against evil.... The prayers of God's saints are the capital stock of heaven by which God carries on His

great work upon earth. God conditions the very life and prosperity of His cause on prayer.”³

When we really get a hold of this truth, that God has limited Himself to only work through His people, we will begin to look at our world in a different way and change our lives to be the heavenly police force. We will take our authority over all the power of the enemy. Jesus said that this authority is ours because of what He had done at the cross: “I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you (Luke 10:19). These snakes and scorpions are symbols of demonic evil spirits that we have been given power over—if we will exercise our authority. The enemy’s only weapon that he can muster against us is his weapon of unbelief. He will oppose prayer more than anything else you can do. He begins to lose when we, the church, take up the weapons that Christ has given us, namely that of prayer, his kingdom is plundered of the precious people that are in bondage to sin and Satan. His work is carried on in the world by prayer. Jesus put it like this:

He told them, “The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. **Ask the Lord** of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field (Luke 10:2).

It obviously was God’s will for more workers to be reaching out, so why was He asking for more workers?

In the passage above, the world is represented as a harvest field, with the ripened sheaves of wheat represented as the not-yet Christians around us that are ready to respond to the gospel if only someone goes to work in the field of their hearts. In preceding verses, we are told that the Master had already sent out 72 workers into the harvest fields of the towns and villages of Israel. His heart for His people and His lost ones was not satisfied with 72 workers reaching out. His passion is that we should cry out to Him in prayer that God would send more workers, so that more would come to know His life-giving salvation and deliverance from their sin. The point I am making is that we all know that it is not God’s will that any should perish, but everyone to come to repentance (2 Peter 3:9), so why should the church have to pray for something that we know is God’s will? The truth is that God does nothing on earth without a man or woman of God exercising the authority that has

been given to man on earth.

Here below are a few quotes from great men of God who knew a few things about prayer:

“Give me one hundred preachers who fear nothing but sin and desire nothing but God, and I care not a straw whether they be clergymen or laymen; such alone will shake the gates of hell and set up the kingdom of heaven on earth. God does nothing but in answer to prayer.”
John Wesley

“Prayer is not overcoming God’s reluctance, but laying hold of His willingness.”
Martin Luther

“Beware in your prayers, above everything else, of limiting God, not only by unbelief, but by fancying that you know what He can do. Expect unexpected things ‘above all that we ask or think.’” Andrew Murray

“Whether we like it or not, asking is the rule of the Kingdom. ‘Ask and ye shall receive.’ It is a rule that never will be altered in anybody’s case. Our Lord Jesus Christ is the elder brother of the family, but God has not relaxed the rule for Him. Remember this text: Jehovah says to his own son, ‘Ask of me, and I shall give Thee the heathen for Thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for Thy possession.’ If the Royal and Divine Son of God cannot be exempted from the rule of asking that He may have, you and I cannot expect the rule to be relaxed in our favor. Why should it be? What reason can be pleaded why we should be exempted from prayer? What argument can there be why we should be deprived of the privilege and delivered from the necessity of supplication? I can see none, can you? God will bless Elijah and send rain on Israel, but Elijah must pray for it. If the chosen nation is to prosper, Samuel must plead for it. If the Jews are to be delivered, Daniel must intercede. God will bless Paul, and the nations shall be converted through him, but Paul must pray. Pray he did without ceasing; his epistles show that he expected nothing except by asking for it. If you may have everything by asking, and nothing without asking, I beg you to see how absolutely vital prayer is, and I beseech you to abound in it.” Charles Spurgeon.

The story is told of a Jewish Rabbi in a Russian city; he was so discouraged with his faith and call, and doubting if God had really spoken to him to be in the ministry. While he was deep in thought and wandering through the chilly night, he inadvertently had strolled into a

³ Destined For The Throne, Paul Billheimer, Bethany House Publishers, Page 51.

Russian compound that was off limits to civilians. All of a sudden there was the loud yell of a soldier shouting, "Hey! Who are you and what are you doing here?" The Rabbi, being caught unaware, responded, "Excuse me?" Again the Russian soldier said, "I said, who are you and what are you doing here?" The Rabbi, trying not to bring any alarm to the situation said, "How much do they pay you every day?" The Russian soldier responded by saying, "What in the world does that have to do with you being in this restricted area?" The Rabbi replied, "I would be willing to pay you the same sum if you would ask me the same two questions every morning, who are you and what are you doing here?"

Our God longs to arrest us with the same question. Who are you and what are you doing here? First, we

must get the truth of who we are in Christ deep into our spirit. We must know that we are a Son or Daughter of the Living God, that we are not our own, that we are bought with a price. Then we must know what we are doing here. What is your purpose? Have you found out what you are supposed to be doing here? I feel sure that when we grasp a hold on the truth of these words concerning prayer, the fruit of our meditations will be a continuous and growing faith in God.

Prayer: Father, please help me to be sensitive to pray first and not last when I am in need, or when you prompt me to see the needs of others. I know that You desire to give, so teach me to ask. Help me to pray and exercise the authority that you have given me. Amen!

Pastor Keith Thomas
Website: www.groupbiblestudy.com
Email: keiththomas7@gmail.com
or: pastorthomas@groupbiblestudy.com