

## PRAYER CHANGES THINGS

### Matthew 17:20

**Introduction:** There was a time when people displayed little plaques on their walls that had sayings like, "Prayer Changes Things" and some had images of a pair of clasped hands in prayer hanging on their walls, and there were clasped hands molded into napkin holders which sat on tables. There were all sort of reminders about prayer. Today those things are not seen as much, or even at all anymore. Christians have always had some difficulties with prayer. Have you? Has there ever been a time in your life when prayer actually changed things? Most prayers said are the same words said the day before and the day before that.

### I. CONSIDER THE VAGUENESS OF OUR PRAYERS

1. Most of our prayers could be answered by a tree or an image carved out of a rock.
  - Most of us are unwilling to really step out in prayer, such as praying for SPECIFICS.
  - We don't HONESTLY believe that prayer changes things, we talk the talk but we don't really believe what we say.
2. Many believe that "whatever will be, will be..."
  - Remember Rosemary Clooney's song, "Que Sera, Sera"... "Whatever will be, will be..?"
  - So, for many, there is the question, why pray in the first place? Nothing will happen.

### II. JESUS GAVE A DRAMATIC CHALLENGE TO PRAYER

1. Jesus did not believe the way we do today about prayer (**17:20**).
2. Why did Jesus say such a thing as what He did in that verse? Did He really mean that or was it a figure of speech? Why not "climbing a mountain" instead of 'MOVING' a mountain?
3. How Jesus must grieve over our timid attitudes toward prayer.
  - He was appalled at the disciples' lack of faith many times.
  - Jesus made a very bold promise in **John 15:7**, "*...Ask what ye will and it shall be done unto you...*"
4. For over 2,000 years Jesus has issued that same challenge to people to pray BIG..
  - To think big for Him.
  - To be bold for Him.
  - To do courageous work in His name.
  - YET, we don't really believe His promises. Face it!
  - Answered prayers are not really believed in, and when prayers are answered, coincidence or some logical explanation is the reason we say. We don't want to be "weird" or too holy, so we look for some more "rational, normal" explanations to answered prayers.

### **III. WE DON'T REALLY BELIEVE IN ANSWERED PRAYERS**

1. God wants us to believe Him. How He must grieve at our lack of faith.
2. Our lack of faith is similar to the early Christian group who were praying for Peter's release from prison and when an angel freed Peter and Peter made his way to where the group were praying for him, knocked on the door, nobody believed it was him. (*Acts 12:1-17*)
3. While they "prayed" in a locked, secure place, God was busy at the prison freeing Peter.
4. They didn't really expect their prayers to be answered for they refused to open the door to let Peter in, they didn't believe it was Peter. We are in no better shape than they were after 2,000 years of theology, experience, etc., we still worry, doubt and don't expect results.
5. Have you ever prayed, "Lord, help me, help me" and come away as frustrated and scared as you were before you prayed? Ever wonder why even pray at all?

### **IV. WE TRY TO USE PRAYER TO MANIPULATE GOD**

1. A woman once got very upset with her "religion" for she had asked God for a lot of things but got no answers.
  - She was once devout and religious, but lately had been ignoring God in her personal life.
  - She had experienced something in her physical life that she was unable to cope with so she rushed to God with explicit orders about what He needed to do.
2. What kind of chaos would result if God tried to answer all our selfish prayers the exact way we want them answered?
3. There is a deep question about God and prayer and that is, "Is God our celestial office boy in the sky who runs errands for us? Or are we His servants?"
4. Sadly, for too many, prayer is the last resort to a situation in one's life.
  - To many, God is about the same as a child's puppet on a string.
  - Childish prayers of "give me, give me, give me" must be replaced with "Lord, what do you want me to do.....?"

### **V. TO PRAY ASSUMES THERE MUST BE CONVERSATION**

1. Prayer implies a relationship and talking with God means one has been born again.
2. Unanswered prayers may be because one has not been born again, not a member of God's family.
3. Prayer is not just talking to empty space, just rattling on about something.
4. Prayer is HOLY conversation between two beings on a relationship of family and love.

5. Is your prayer life based on a relationship with Jesus Christ?
6. If your light switch fails to turn on the light, are you through with using electricity? NO, you go find the problem and fix it.
7. Prayer that doesn't work doesn't work for a reason.
8. One cannot live a life of self-indulgence, self-will, in trouble, out of trouble, have problems and then say a quick prayer and expect God to fix it all up so one can go on as before.
9. Some tell a "little white lie," cheat here and there, use God's name profanely, yield themselves to sinful desires and when their sins catch up with them, the very first thing they do is "pray" for relief.

## CONCLUSION:

1. How is it between you and God? Have you been trying to manipulate Him? Do you think you can do your own thing, a little wrong here and there and all you have to do is pray and God will fix things up? Is that how you pray? God never promised to honor or answer that kind of prayer.
2. James said that *"...effectual (persistent) fervent prayer will be productive.....of a righteous man avails much.."*
  - Persistent, day by day prayer is productive.
  - Be careful if you pray ONLY when things get bad or tough.
3. Does prayer really change things? YES! Moving mountains is God's specialty. However, God doesn't always move them in the way we want, think or pray.
4. Is your prayer life meaningful and growing? Are you bold in your prayers? Do you expect results from your praying?
  - Do you think "it's fixed" and nothing will change, no matter how much you pray?
  - That need in your life, that burden you are carrying, do you just not pray about it because you think nothing can be done about it?
  - Maybe you never knew that "prayer really does change things..."
5. How important is prayer? Jesus prayed for hours that God would change His plan and the cross could be avoided, but God said "NO" to Jesus. Jesus didn't hesitate to pray, to let His request be known to God.
6. Are there some mountains in your life that need moving?
  - Are you carrying burdens around that only God can move?
  - How big, then is your God?
  - If God were some speck of divinity, then it would be understood why one would not pray, but God is God! A personal, loving, all powerful God and His word tells us that nothing is impossible for Him. So PRAY and expect God to answer!