

PRAYER IS...ASKING

II Kings 19:1-38; Matthew 7:7-11

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INTRODUCTION

- A. Did you make a resolution for the New Year? Yes? No? You want to be healthy, lose weight, get a better hold on your finances, or take up a new hobby? Slacklining or beat boxing.

I was thinking, we should make practical resolutions – you know, ones that are more attainable. For example:

1. This year, I'm going to eat more tacos.
2. Or, this year, I'm going to live my best life and, as often as possible, wear sweat pants or shorts.
3. Or maybe, this year, I'm going to unfriend every person who talks all the time about their diet or exercise routine.
4. I think we would get to the end of 2023 feeling like we've really accomplished something!

- C. But what if...what if...instead of focusing on random things, what if we made a resolution to improve in the most important area of our life?
1. What if we said: "This year, I want to know Jesus better"? Or, "I want to make my relationship with God a bigger priority." What if we made resolutions like that?
 2. That's why today, as our year begins, we are beginning a three-part series called "Prayer Is..."
 3. We believe... knowing Jesus makes life better. And knowing Jesus even better makes life even better, richer, more meaningful and more purposeful.
 4. And since prayer helps us get to know Jesus on a deeper and more personal level, prayer is one of the keys to a better life.

- D. Can we talk for a minute, though?
1. Maybe you are new to the church thing. It's a new year and you've said, "We need to give church a shot." Maybe, your understanding of God

and prayer and all the church stuff is a little murky. You're thinking, "I'm glad I'm here, but I'm not sure that I'm ready for a Master Class on prayer."

Well, if that's you, here's my promise:

What we are going to do, each week, is look at a story in the Bible, and look to apply what that story teaches us. So I hope you will join us all three weeks. Deal?

2. Then there are some of us who are saying, "I don't have time to pray. I'm just too busy. I can just figure things out on my own. Okay?" I'm going to ask you to consider that without prayer, you might be working hard at life, but that doesn't mean that life is better. So, would you consider this an invitation to understand prayer as an opportunity to become a more resilient and content person because with prayer, you're going to have a deeper relationship with Jesus.

3. And then there are some of us who are thinking, "I don't want to hear a series about prayer, because I just don't think that God hears my prayers."

a. You probably feel that way because there was this time that you sincerely prayed about that thing and God didn't do what you asked him to do.

b. Maybe something was on the verge of happening and you prayed to God that it wouldn't happen. But it did. And it was awful. And painful. Still is.

c. And maybe, right then and there, you decided that what was best for you was to keep God at a distance. That you weren't going to worry about getting close to God because, well, why should you? What did it matter?

4. Well, if I just describe how any of us are feeling, let me say this: WellSpring is a place where we can tackle some of the spiritual struggles we have with other people who have, most likely, gone through a lot of things we are going through. And you can face your challenging issues and not be judged for it. We would much rather you honestly face what your problem is with God here, rather than just blow it off or ignore it.

5. And what we are going to be looking at specifically today, might help all of us understand why God does, or sometimes doesn't, answer prayer the way we would like Him to.

6. We believe that one of the most important ways that we can be at peace with God is to go deep with God in prayer.

- F. R.C. Sproul said, “Prayer does change things, all kinds of things. But the most important thing it changes is us.”
1. Prayer is not just the hurling of empty words up toward the heavens hoping that someone hears.
 2. When we pray, we are making time to be alone with God. To talk with Him. To listen to Him. And to find guidance how to be more like Him.
 3. And by looking at three people and their stories in the Old Testament, we will see that prayer not only helps us understand God better and know God better, but it also helps us become more like Him.
 4. During this series, each week we are going to look at a different aspect of prayer and find that: Prayer is...asking. Prayer is...listening. And prayer is...essential.
- G. What we are going to be talking about today is how “Prayer is...asking.”
1. Our focus verses for our story today are found in II Kings 18-19.
 2. If you are following along in one of the Bibles in the chair in front of you, you can turn to page 264 or you can follow along with the words that will be on the screen.
 3. Two main characters in today’s story: King Hezekiah of Judah and Sennacherib the king of Assyria.
 4. About 700 years before the birth of Jesus.
 5. Hezekiah becomes king at the age of 25 years old – he’s Rob’s age. And the Bible tells us he “...did what was right in the eyes of the Lord.” _II Kings 18:3.

IN THE WORD

- I. Hezekiah has been king for about 14 years when, in 703 B.C., King Sennacherib, launches a major military campaign with an army of, probably, over 200,000 men, to fill his coffers with more money.
- After successfully subduing and plundering two other nations, Sennacherib turns his attention to Judah in 701 B.C.
 - In II Kings 18, we read how Sennacherib attacks and captures some of the walled, fortified cities of Judah – which makes King Hezekiah in Jerusalem anxious.

- In response, Hezekiah tries to bargain with Sennacherib so that he will go away and leave the city of Jerusalem alone. Sennacherib says, “Pay me 300 talents of silver and 30 talents of gold.” Scholars have calculated this to be the equivalent of hundreds of millions of dollars.
- Hezekiah takes silver and gold from his palace and from the Lord’s temple and sends it to Sennacherib. But that didn’t satisfy Sennacherib. It only makes him want more. So Sennacherib sends officers and an army on to Jerusalem to pressure Hezekiah to surrender.
- Hezekiah sends out his emissaries to meet the Assyrians.
- Now, this whole time, as a godly king, Hezekiah had been reminding his officials and the people that the Lord was on their side.
- But the Assyrians message to Hezekiah’s emissaries is simple: “Do not let Hezekiah deceive you. He cannot deliver you...Do not let Hezekiah persuade you to the trust in the Lord when he says, ‘The Lord will surely deliver us; this city will not be given into the hand of the king of Assyria.’ Do not listen to Hezekiah.” II Kings 18:29-31
- They say, “He is misleading you when he says, ‘The Lord will deliver us.’” II Kings 18:32
- But Hezekiah’s representatives don’t say a word. After their meeting with the Assyrians, they go back to Hezekiah and tell him what the Assyrians have said.
- When Hezekiah gets their report, he’s very upset and tears his clothes which is a sign of great distress and emotion.
- It would be like us hearing bad news and wanting to throw something or punch something.

II. What do we do when an enemy shows up out our door? What do we do when we have built walls for protection and an enemy shows up who threatens to destroy or rob those things that are important to us? What do you do when you are facing a powerful bully? Can you negotiate? Can we appease the bully? Or are we helpless? Do we really have any answers?

The bully can be another person – like the big kid named Biff who threatens to take your lunch money. What can you do about Biff?

Or it can be a situation – like a life threatening diagnosis. What are you going to do?

For those of us who are over 30, one of the times we felt this collective anxiety from a bully was September 11, 2001. And I remember trying to get my head around what was happening and what to do next. And one of the things we all did was look to our President and see how he would respond.

III. Well, that's what it was like for the people of Judah and King Hezekiah. No one is really sure what to do about the Assyrians. He's tried paying off Sennacherib, but that didn't work.

- II Kings 19:1 says that Hezekiah, "...went into the house of the Lord." II Kings 19:1

- Facing a powerful threat, Hezekiah goes to God in prayer.

- Some see prayer as a weak response; however, prayer is a natural response when an enemy shows up at your door.

IV. Next, Hezekiah sends word to the prophet Isaiah. A prophet was a spokesman for God. He says, "This is a hard day. An unsettling day. The Assyrians are at the door and they are threatening us. They are even making fun of the Lord." And then he says to Isaiah, "Therefore, pray."

- Not only does Hezekiah pray, but he wants others to be praying too.

- And Isaiah replies...

"This is what the Lord says: Do not be afraid of what you have heard – those words with which the underlings of the king of Assyria have blasphemed me. Listen! I am going to put such a spirit in him that when he hears a certain report, he will return to his own country and there I will have him cut down with the sword." _II Kings 19:5-7

- Well, that's good news. Isaiah says, "God says, 'Don't be afraid of Sennacherib. I will take care of him.'"

- Wouldn't that be great if God said, "Don't worry about that bully, I'm going to take care of him"? Or wouldn't it be great if God said, "Don't worry about that medical report. I got this."

Or, "Don't worry about the financial crunch you're going through. I'll take care of it for you."

- But the reality is that God doesn't always operate like that. And when we get to the end of our story, we will see why. But God wants Hezekiah to know – "You don't need to be afraid of Sennacherib.

- But just like it's hard for us to have peace of mind when a bully is at your door, it's that way for Hezekiah too.
- In spite of God's promise, He doesn't do anything immediately.
- And it just so happens that, at this time, Sennacherib is bent on applying more pressure. And, evidently, he has a good team of spies because he always seems to know what is being discussed among Hezekiah and his officials.
- Sennacherib sends another message to Hezekiah that essentially says, "Do not let the god you depend on deceive you when he says, 'Jerusalem will not be handed over to Assyria. None of the other nations gods helped them either.'"

Can I drop some words of wisdom? We should never underestimate God. It's never a good idea to tell other people what God can or can't or won't do. Just a suggestion. I know some people think that they've got God figured out or they think that He's kind of a weak and measly god. Well, that's a mistake. Sennacherib is seriously underestimating God.

V. Hezekiah receives this letter from Sennacherib and reads it. Then he goes up to the temple, to the house of the Lord, again. And Hezekiah spreads the letter out before the Lord. And then he begins to pray...

"O Lord, God of Israel, enthroned between the cherubim [the angels], you alone are God over all the kingdoms of the earth. You have made heaven and earth. Give ear, O Lord, and hear; open your eyes, O Lord, and see; listen to the words of Sennacherib has sent to insult the living God. It is true, O Lord, that the Assyrian kings have laid waste these nations and their lands. They have thrown their gods into the fire and destroyed them, for they were not gods but only wood and stone, fashioned by men's hands. Now, O Lord, Our God, deliver us from his hand, so that all kingdoms on earth may know that you alone, O Lord, are God."
 _II Kings 19:15-19

VI. I want us to notice...

A. Hezekiah has a place to pray – in the temple.

- If you are going to pray, you need a place. Maybe it's in the car. Maybe it's in your home office. Maybe it's on the back deck. But if you are going to spend time alone with God, you need a place.

B. Hezekiah begins his prayer by acknowledging God's sovereignty over all nations.

- “You alone are God over all the kingdoms of the earth” – even Sennacherib.
- C. Then Hezekiah acknowledges how God is all-powerful.
 - “You have made heaven and earth.”
 - If God is the Creator of heaven and earth, nothing is impossible for Him.
 - He is all-powerful and Sennacherib is powerless.
- D. Hezekiah asks God to notice his situation.
 - Are you hearing all this, Lord? Are you seeing all this, Lord? Have you heard how Sennacherib is insulting you?
- E. Hezekiah then asks God to save them from Sennacherib.
 - “O Lord, Our God, deliver us from his hand.”
- F. And finally, Hezekiah says to God, “all kingdoms on earth [will] know that you alone, O Lord, are God.”
 - *“This is so big that if you take care of Sennacherib, everyone will know it. Everyone will know who you are!”*
- G. But in his prayer, Hezekiah is laying everything out before God and asking for God to intervene – for God to help – for God to protect His people.

VII. Do you remember what Jesus said about prayer?

- “Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.” _Matthew 7:7-8
- There is a principle that we see all throughout the Bible. We read about it in the Old Testament. We read about it in the New Testament. It’s something that Jesus is saying here.
- We should pray, sharing our wants and burdens with God, asking Him for help.

APPLICATION

A. When I was about 7 or 8 years old, I remember praying (and I remember exactly where I was – at my grandparents in their carport), I prayed, “God if you are real, I pray that when I get home, I would have \$50 waiting for me.”

There’s nothing wrong with that right? Well...

But when I got home, the \$50 wasn't there.
Is God not real or does God not care?

Maybe you once prayed that you would ace a test...and you didn't. Or you prayed that your team would win the game...and they didn't. Or that you Aunt Bev would die so you could inherit her fortune...and maybe she did, but you didn't. We've all prayed for something that didn't happen.

Is God not real? Or does God not care?

And the answer is: God hears all our prayers because he cares for us, but He doesn't always do what we want Him to do or ask Him to do, because...He cares for us.

And maybe God doesn't want us to think that He's the kind of God who can be manipulated to do what we want Him to do.

B. Do you remember what Jesus prayed the night before His crucifixion? He knew what was coming. He knew the suffering that was only hours away. He knew the loneliness He would face. And honestly, he prayed, "Father, I pray that all this would pass over me. I don't want to do it." But then he prayed, "But not my will, but yours be done."

When we pray, we may have a preference, but God has a plan. But God also has the ability to see every aspect of the situation, every consequence of each action. And He actually knows what is best for us or best for others.

Job 42:2 says, "I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted." _Job 42:2

And the truth is, ultimately, God is going to do what God decides to do. God has a will. God has a plan. And nothing or no one can thwart His plans.

So when we pray and ask God for something, we should remember the prayer of Jesus. *Lord, this is what I want, but what you want is more important. So*

whatever you decide, whether to answer my prayer with a yes or a no, I will trust you.

C. So even though God has His own will and may not answer our prayer, it doesn't mean God doesn't care about us.

1. Writer Griffin Gullledge wrote, "When it comes down to it, God answers prayers in only two ways: **provision or protection**. If he gives us what we ask for, it's because of his great love. But the converse is also true (and what we so often miss): If the Lord *isn't* giving us what we're asking for, then he's protecting us from it."

2. God answers our prayers with a much deeper understanding of what is best for our provision and protection.

3. When we prayed for that job we didn't get it – God said "no," because He was either protecting us or looking out for our provision.

4. When we prayed for God to open up a door in order to have a relationship with that person – and things didn't work out? It was either for our protection or provision. (That's Garth Brooks theology.)

5. When we pray for that bully to go away and it doesn't, even a bully doesn't get the last say – God does. Even if the bully doesn't go away when we want it too – one day God will make all things right. Sometimes, even on the other side of eternity. God can be trusted to do what is best for our protection and provision.

CONCLUSION

A. So what was God's response to Hezekiah's prayer?

1. God did what He said He would do.

2. "That night the angel of the LORD went out and put to death a hundred and eighty-five thousand in the Assyrian camp. When the people got up the next morning—there were all the dead bodies! So Sennacherib king of Assyria broke camp and withdrew. He returned to Nineveh and stayed there." __ II Kings 19:25-36

3. Sennacherib's vast army was nearly wiped out by the Lord. 185,000 men. God answered Hezekiah's prayer. Sennacherib survives, but he musters the army and they head home for Assyria. But God wasn't done with Sennacherib.

4. Verse 37: "One day, while he was worshipping in the temple of his god Nisroch, his sons Adrammalech and Sharezer cut him down with a sword." _II Kings 19:37

5. God will always humble the proud. He will eventually humble any challenger to His authority. And God did what God promised Hezekiah He would do.

B. When we pray, God can be trusted.

1. I want to challenge you to spend time alone with God every day in prayer.

2. I challenge you to pour out your heart to Him and ask Him for big, bold things.

3. And I challenge you to trust His answer. God knows what's best and you can trust Him to be looking out for your provision and protection.

4. And when we do those things, we might find that God is moving to help us become something we weren't before – a stronger person, a more faithful person, and a person who is more like Jesus.

5. And becoming more like Jesus is something we should all be resolved to.

C. Let me close with a question. Are you here to know about God or to know God?

1. I remember when my kids were little what I would ask them after church: "What did you learn about Jesus today?" And I realized that was the wrong question. The right question is, "How did you grow closer to Jesus today?"

2. Hopefully no one will leave today thinking, "Now I know more about God and prayer." My hope is that everyone will say, "I'm going to pray so I can know God better."

D. The truth is that we were created to know God.

1. He created us to know Him and have a relationship with Him.

2. But our problem is sin, spiritual rebellion. It separates us from God.

3. God's remedy to the problem of sin is Jesus' death on the cross.

4. And the choice to find hope and healing and forgiveness, is to give our life to Jesus. To not just know about God; to not just know about Jesus, but to know Him.

Maybe on the first day of this year, that's what you would like to do, invite Jesus into your life as your Leader and Forgiver.

In just a moment, we are going to sing together and I'm going to be right down front if you would like to talk about your walk with Jesus.

E. Let's pray...