

1 Kings 17:17-24 Keep Praying! Pentecost 3 June 30, 2019

By Pastor Kenneth Mellon, Trinity Lutheran Church and School, Pleasant Valley Rd., West Bend, WI

Grace and peace from God our Father give us confidence that God will hear our prayers in Christ. Amen. God's Word to each us about prayer and God's power to answer are written in 1 Kings 17:17-24. These are your words heavenly Father. Help us to listen and take them to heart. Your Word is truth!

Dear Partners in Prayer, in Christ,

How important is it to pray to God? We know that God has told us to pray and promised to hear us. But, how much time should we take to pray each day? Martin Luther was once quoted to say, "At times I was so busy with my work that I prayed for three hours in a day." Is that how we view the need for prayer? Do we begin the day seeking His blessing and end a day in peace? What is the benefit of prayer?

I am often getting prayer requests from people. But, I remind them that God hears the prayer of any believer just as well as He hears my prayers. But, sometimes it doesn't seem to matter who is praying, because it seems like God doesn't hear or answer prayers. We may wonder if it's worth taking the time to pray, since God is going to do His will anyway. Yet, God makes it clear that prayer is effective. So,

Keep Praying!

1. Prayer is a matter of faith. Praying is a part of who we are as Christians. John wrote, "*This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us*" (1 John 5:14). What if we don't know His will? We can still pray with confidence in Christ knowing God will answer in a way that's best. I'm not saying that we will always like God's answers, but we can be confident that He works everything for good.

We read in 1 Kings 17 that the prophet Elijah had been praying. God told him to pray against the storm god, Baal, so that it would not rain and it didn't rain for over 3 years. During this time Israel's wicked king and queen, Ahab and Jezebel, were looking to kill Elijah. But God hid him first in a remote area by a river and then north of Israel with a widow in a foreign land. God told Elijah to stay with her and that He would provide enough to feed the woman, her son, and Elijah until the famine ended. The woman believed Elijah's promise from God, cooked the handful of food she had remaining first for Elijah, and then for her family. I'm sure Elijah had a prayer before the meal to thank the Lord for providing. That small amount of flour in a jar and oil gave meals for them for over a year!

Sometime later, the woman's little boy got sick and died. The woman was grief-stricken. Her son survived starvation only to die of an illness! She said to Elijah, "*What do you have against me, man of God? Did you come to remind me of my sin and kill my son?*" (v.18). She had heard good news from Elijah, but she saw bad results. The woman felt her sinfulness and thought God was punishing her. Her faith was tested. She could have given up in sadness or she could have gone to some prophets of Baal or some other gods. But, she brought her little dead son to Elijah. He too was tested. He doesn't use nice words with God. He cried out, "*O Lord my God, have you brought tragedy (wickedness) also upon this widow I am staying with, by causing her son to die?*" (vs. 20). God had given Elijah a quiet refuge with this family, and now it was like God taking it all away. Elijah shouldn't have said that, and neither should we when we have problems. The devil was trying to stop God's work that day. But Elijah didn't give up. He knew that in a crisis he had all the more need to pray!

When we face problems or temptations, what can we learn from this lesson? At times things happen to us that we don't understand and they can make us angry or they can try to keep us from praying to God for what we need. At other times, we become anxious or complain to God instead of praying to Him. Paul wrote, "*Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God*" (Philippians 4:6). Pray and trust in God! Don't give up!

2. God will answer. Despite the wrong words used by Elijah and the widow's doubts, God was ready to hear their request. It's because God is always gracious toward His people despite their sins. Elijah didn't know if it was God's will to restore this boy's life or take his soul to heaven. But, Elijah knew that God's reputation was at stake. If this boy died while under the protection of Elijah's God, this woman would lose her young faith. Elijah wanted to see the woman's faith restored in God along with the life of her son. That is why He prayed, *"O Lord my God, let this boy's life return to him! (Now!)"* *"The Lord heard Elijah's cry, and the boy's life returned to him, and he lived"* (v.21-22).

Why did God hear and answer Elijah? Was he better than the widow who prayed? No, he was a sinner just like her or anyone else. Was it because Elijah used such fitting words to pray? No, his prayer was a complaint to God for allowing something evil to happen! But, like Elijah, the reason that we pray is that we know God loves us so much He sent His Son as the Christ.

Already at Elijah's time, there were prophecies about God sending His Son to save His people. Think about Good Friday and a widow that stood below Jesus at His crucifixion. As Jesus suffered on the cross, I'm sure that His mother below Him, the disciples, and many believers were praying that Jesus' life would be spared. He had lived a sinless life and didn't deserve to die. He had always made proper prayers to God as His Father. Yet, on the cross, Jesus said, *"My God... why have you forsaken me?"* (Matthew 27:46). God turned His back on Jesus as He carried the sins of the world on Himself and suffered and died for them all. Then He raised Christ from death to show that He will hold no sin against us. *"There is now no condemnation to those who are in Christ"* (Romans 12:1). Through faith in Christ, we are now the children of God, whose prayers He always hears! The way to God is wide open through Christ!

So, why does God allow us to be troubled like Elijah, the widow, or her son? Elijah had threats against his life. The widow lived in poverty. The son became sick and died. God doesn't always grant a prayer for what we want or need. He doesn't always answer a prayer for healing. Paul pleaded with God to take away a problem he had. But God said, *"My grace is sufficient for you"* (2 Corinthians 12:8). God gave Paul something better to help him in his witness for Christ. Even if God doesn't answer as we want, we can pray with confidence. God has already given us His Son to save us. He proved His love for us. We know that God will hear us. As we leave things in God's hands we can certainly praise Him.

Honoring God is another reason for us to keep praying! The fact that God answered Elijah's prayer confirmed the woman's faith. Elijah carried the boy back to the woman and said, *"Look, your son is alive!"* Then the woman said, *"Now I know that you are a man of God and that the word of the Lord from your mouth is the truth"* (v.23, 24). God has given us His Word so that we believe in Jesus and pray to God through Him. Not only do we praise the Lord for answering specific prayers, but we praise Him for the gift of His Son who makes us God's dear children through faith and gives us eternal life.

Only God knows what great things will be accomplished by our powerful God when we pray to Him even when facing hardship or tragedy. God has given us His Word that we might boldly pray to Him. In Christ's forgiveness, nothing stands between us and our God. We can be sure that God will hear our prayers. So keep praying and keep praising our God who does great things as He hears our prayers! Amen