Series: Prayer That Works

Message: The Power of Persuasive Prayer

Text: Exodus 32:7-14

Theme:

Date: July 281, 2019

Location: Christ Community EFC

**If you would please turn in your Bibles to Exodus chapter 32, p 72.**

So far in our sermon series, Prayer That Works, we have looked at how to pray like a righteous man by looking at the example of Elijah’s prayer found in 1 Kings 18:42-46.

We saw that we should work at our prayers. We need to be specific in our prayers as we pray in align with God’s will, work, and word.

We should pray expecting an answer to our prayers. And God will use our answered prayers as a witness to others.

We handed out prayer journals that first week to encourage you and to help you follow Elijah’s example of prayer. If you didn’t get one there are extras in the office window. Be sure and pick one up.

Last week we looked at the power of persistent prayer as we looked at the parable of the persistent widow.

In this parable Jesus is teaching his followers to be persistent in prayer. Don’t give up! Don’t lose heart.

Remember, we said that **persistence is for our sake, not God’s.**

Persistence compels us to the true center of prayer, which is not something but someone. Persistence deepens our relationship with God.

And it compels the heart to examine what it really wants most.

Do you want God’s will? Do you want God…even more than you want what you are asking from Him?

Persistence demands patience—waiting. Patience is the ground of spiritual growth. It is the rich soil where spiritual vitality and health takes root!

And we ended by saying that when we pray we should PUSH.

P-ray!!!

U-ntil!!!

S-omething!!!

H-appens!!!

Pray until something happens, either God answers your prayer, changes your heart thereby changing what and how you are praying, or until the Spirit of God releases you from the burden you are praying for.

**This morning we are going to be looking at “The Power of Persuasive Prayer”.**

Let me just put this question out there.

If God is sovereign, He is in control and has authority over everything, and He is all knowing—He knows everything that has happened and will happen, and He is all powerful—nothing can happen outside of His will, then what role do our prayers have in changing God’s plans.

In other words, do our prayers somehow persuade God to do something he wasn’t otherwise planning to do?

Or is God going to do what God is going to do, and pray just gives us something to do until God moves?

As we look at today’s text (dealing with Moses’ prayer for Israel)… I think we can find some answers.

**First, let’s look at the setting for Moses’ prayer.**

About 4 months earlier, Moses led the Israelites out of Egypt, and it seems - from the moment they were freed from slavery - the Israelites did nothing but complain.

They complained at the waters of the Red Sea because they were afraid of the Egyptians.

They complained in the desert because they didn’t think they had enough to eat.

They complained that they didn’t think they had enough to drink

When they got to Mt. Horeb and saw the power of God displayed in lightning, thunder and smoke and they heard the voice of God, as He spoke declaring the 10 Commandments, they (in essence) told Moses – You go talk to Him… we can’t stand to listen to Him anymore! (20:19)

From the time they left Egypt, the Israelites had done nothing but complain and grumble.

And finally, while Moses is up on the Mountain top with this all powerful knowing God, the Israelites decide that they’re bored and they talk Aaron (Moses’ brother) into making a golden calf for them to worship.

They did this **in spite** of the fact that this was a direct violation of the second commandment that God had just given them a little over 40 days before!

The Israelites have been nothing but trouble ever since God freed them from their chains… and now it appears God has had enough.

Let’s pick up the story in Exodus 32:7-10 “**And the LORD said to Moses, “Go down, for your people, whom you brought up out of the land of Egypt, have corrupted themselves.**

This almost reminds me of a mom who is at her wits ends dealing the children and dad walks in. She takes one look at him as says; Do you know what YOUR son did today!?

**8 They have turned aside quickly out of the way that I commanded them. They have made for themselves a golden calf and have worshiped it and sacrificed to it and said, ‘These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!’”**

**9 And the LORD said to Moses, “I have seen this people, and behold, it is a stiff-necked people. 10 Now therefore let me alone, that my wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them, in order that I may make a great nation of you.”**

In essence God tells Moses, “I’m going to wipe them off the face of the earth and start over with you.”

**Was God serious? Did He really intend to annihilate the entire nation and rebuild a new nation from Moses’ offspring?**

Yes… I believe He did!

Parents back me up on this. Basic parenting 101—never threaten a punishment that you don’t intend to follow through with.

Right?! You do that and your kids pick up on that and they have no reason to obey you in the future!

God doesn’t bluff and He doesn’t make idol threats. It is clear in this passage that Moses certainly took God seriously.

He was so convinced that God intended to do what He threatened, that he offered up an immediate and extremely intense prayer.

Look here at Exodus 32:11: “**But Moses implored the LORD his God and said, “O LORD, why does your wrath burn hot against your people, whom you have brought out of the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand?**

**12 Why should the Egyptians say, ‘With evil intent did he bring them out, to kill them in the mountains and to consume them from the face of the earth’?**

**Turn from your burning anger and relent from this disaster against your people.**

**13 Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, your servants, to whom you swore by your own self, and said to them, ‘I will multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven, and all this land that I have promised I will give to your offspring, and they shall inherit it forever.’”**

And then there is this amazing verse here: **14 And the LORD relented from the disaster that he had spoken of bringing on his people.**

The KJV says that “**the LORD repented.** The NASB says that “…**the LORD changed His mind…**

What is going on here? Did Moses’s prayer just persuade God to change his mind? Is that what this says?

And here’s what’s even more confusing.

Moses, the same author who just wrote in Exodus 32 that “**God changed his mind**” wrote earlier in Numbers 23:19: “**God is not man, that he should lie, or a son of man, that he should change his mind.**

What do you do with this? I thought God never changed. He is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow.

Frist, the Bible never contradicts itself. So if you are reading along and you find a verse and you think “Oh this verse means this.”

But that interpretation of that verse contradicts the clear teaching of rest of the Bible than I would have to say you have misunderstood the verse you were reading and need to rethink it.

However, there are some truths in the Bible that are clearly taught across Scripture, that we find hard to reconcile them together.

For example. The Bible clearly teaches that God is one. There is only one God. At the same time, there are three persons in the Bible who are God—the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—the Trinity.

How do you put these two truths together? We have to keep in mind we live in the Western culture. The nation of Israel, the Jews live in the Eastern culture.

In the West we tend to see things as it is either A **or** B. The East have no problem seeing things A **and** B.

Here, I have a short video that will help. [Fiddler on the Roof - On the Other Hand]

Here are two truths we need to hold in tension. God never changes, His nature, character, nor do His purposes.

But, He does change in how He responds to us based on our actions and attitudes.

On the one hand…

A. God’s purposes are unchanging.

Verses like Numbers 23:19 are clear. God is not a man, he ever changes his mind.

Isaiah reinforces idea this in Isaiah 46:9-10 “**…for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me, 10 declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, ‘My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose.**”

And Paul says in Ephesians 1:11: “**In him we have…been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will.”**

Moses, Isaiah and Paul are your three most significant Bible writers (in terms of content) and they all say the same thing.

So, it seems clear that A. God’s purposes are unchanging, but…

On the other hand…

B. God’s response changes based on our actions

In Jeremiah 18:8 we read “…**if that nation, concerning which I have spoken, turns from its evil, I will relent of the disaster that I intended to do to it**.

Speaking of the people of Nineveh in Jonah 3:10 “**When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil way, God relented of the disaster that he had said he would do to them, and he did not do it**.

The word “relented” that is used in Exodus 32:14 means that God embarked on a different course of action.

God is not inflexible; He responds to individuals’ needs, attitudes, and actions and prayers.

The greatest example of this is when as sinner invites Christ into their lives. Apart from the Christ’ saving work in the cross we are all sinners—objects of God’s wrath. God must judge and condemn sin.

When we pray to receive Christ we are no longer destined to condemnation but to eternal life, adopted into the family of God.

Here in Exodus 32, God changed his course of action based on Moses’s prayer.

Here is another is it A **or** B or is it A **and** B situation: God’s will our free will.

3. God’s sovereign ty and our prayers

The text is clear: Without this prayer, God would have destroyed Israel.

Moses’ persuaded God to change his course of action through his prayer.

But, what if Moses had refused to pray? Would that mean that they would not have been saved, and would that mean that it was not God’s will to save them after all?

And what does that mean if I fail to pray for something God wants me to pray for? Does that mean that the thing that I didn’t pray about wasn’t God’s will after all? Or would God have just gotten someone else to pray it?”

But these are the wrong questions to ask about these situations. The Bible never teaches us to think about the will of God that way.

I have found what 19th century Princeton theologian A.A. Hodge said helpful:

“Does God know the day you’ll die? Yes. Has he appointed that day? Yes. Can you do anything to change that day? No. Then why do you eat? To live. What happens if you don’t eat? You die. Then if you don’t eat, and die, then would that be the day that God had appointed for you to die?

…Quit asking stupid questions and just eat. Eating is the pre-ordained way God has appointed for living.”

Let’s quit asking stupid questions and just PRAY.

4. What you are supposed to take away from this?

Think about this. Moses didn’t know about what the people were doing. God tells him about it.

Let’s go back to Exodus 32:7: “**And the LORD said to Moses, “Go down** [Go down—God is sending Moses down to be with his people]**, for your people, whom you brought up out of the land of Egypt, have corrupted themselves**.

By reminding Moses that these are his people, God is trying to help Moses identify with them, connect with them, in a sense, see them as his flock to care for.

Look again at the prayer itself. Exodus 32:11: **“But Moses implored the LORD his God and said, “O LORD, why does your wrath burn hot against your people, whom you have brought out of the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand?**

God herd the cries of the people of Israel when they were in Egypt and delivered them out of bondage. They way God answered past prayers build faith for Moses’ current prayer.

**12 Why should the Egyptians say, ‘With evil intent did he bring them out, to kill them in the mountains and to consume them from the face of the earth’?**

In this prayer Moses is concerned first with the glory of God, that God would answer this prayer in a way that would bring Him most glory.

**13 Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, your servants, to whom you swore by your own self…**

God never changes, his character and nature and God’s Word never changes. Moses prays according to the word of God. There are thousands of promises in the Bible we can pray back to God.

So, when you put all this together, what you see is that God had put Moses into a situation so that he would see the problem, remember God’s promises, and pray—petition God to change his course of action.

God wants Moses to ask this, so in this divine appointment God puts Moses in a situation where he will.

But Moses is not a robot or a computer who just replays what he has been pre-programed to say. No! Moses’s heart had been softened and prepared for this as he had spent time in the presence of the Lord.

God has sovereignly placed you in certain situations precisely for the express purpose of praying his promises and “changing his plans” to employ divine power to create a different destiny than the one everyone is heading to.

(Let that sink in: God sovereignly puts his people in situations so that we can claim his promises and change his response.)

Your situation—the problems you are observing and the divinely appointed opportunities in them—are divinely appointed invitations to call God’s promises into effect.

Like Moses, he has “**sent you down**” into a family; a group of friends; a neighborhood.

Some of you have looked around at your family and thought, “Why did God make me part of this family?” He put you there for you to pray.

As a follower of Christ, you are chosen to pray.

And part of that means that you have been sovereignly placed to certain situations where you can perceive what God wants and say to God, “Let your kingdom come in this situation, let your will be done in this moment.”

5, You need to be absolutely full of two things if you are going to be persuasive in your prayers.

Firt the Word God and second the Spirit of God.

Because these are the two means God has given to you to perceive the kingdom of God and the will of God.

First the word: This Bible is not just a textbook to be learned, but a book of promises to be claimed! To be put into effect.

Like Moses, we are supposed to say, “God, remember you said…”

Read through this book on your knees. Don’t just read your way through Scripture, pray your way through it!

The second thing you ought to be full of is the Spirit of God: trust in him to guide you as you pray, to show you where and how to extend God’s kingdom.

Every couple of years I take 4 or 5 days and go up to an Abbey in New York for a prayer retreat. Part of the experience is that while you are at the retreat there is no talking.

It’s amazing, when we stop talking at God, and start listing to what the Spirit is say, just how much God is saying to us.

We’re just not listening! Prayer is not just talking; it is listening. Let the Spirit of God “send you down” into situations where you can pray.

Be full of the word and the Spirit, and you’ll be closer to what Moses experiences here.

It has been said: The prayers heard by heaven are the ones that start in heaven.

On that mountain Moses perceived what heaven wanted to do and he prayed it into effect.

CONCLUSION

There is a parallel between what Moses did for the children of Israel and what Jesus would one day do for us.

Like Moses, Jesus stood in the gap between the anger of a righteous God and the sin of his people.

Like Moses, Jesus offered for God to take his life rather than destroy us (Exodus 32:32).

But whereas Moses only offered it, Jesus actually did it.

God said to Moses, I’ll destroy the children of Israel and take you.

Jesus replied, destroy me and take them. Jesus was the mediator who would die rather than let us perish.

And that shows me that when I feel alone and that my prayers have not been heard it’s not true, I have not been abandoned. I am not alone.

Jesus gave his life so that I would never be abandoned. And because of that, I know that God hears me when I pray.

And I can leave my request at his feet. I can trust that whatever he is doing, he is pursuing his good plan in me.

Where have you been appointed to pray? Will you boldly take your place?

**Benediction**

**“The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you; the Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace.” (Num. 6:24-26)**