

Hopewell ARP Prayer Meeting, Wednesday, July 15, 2020

Devotional on James 5:16b–18

The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much. ¹⁷ Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain; and it did not rain on the land for three years and six months. ¹⁸ And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth produced its fruit.

What is the prayer of faith from v15? We remembered back, last week to 1:2–12, that the prayer of faith is that unwavering prayer that seeks from God a heart of wisdom to number our days and to live in light of eternity. We also noted that it is the sort of prayer that one would expect the elders of the church to lead him in, based upon the character requirements of their office, and includes confession of sin.

Of course, if we have been forgiven sin, and our faith in Jesus Christ is compelling us to think of our life and live our life as being on the doorstep of eternity, then it is the prayer of the righteous. The last of v16 literally says, “much is accomplished by the prayer of the righteous as it works [effectively].”

Upon what do we base our assessment of whether or not our prayers work? Is it when we can see something happen that we think our prayers are working? God forbid! This Scripture says that we know that they work if we are righteous.

Now, does this mean that if our faith is strong enough then our prayers will work? There are many who think like this about prayer. That if someone doesn't get what he wants from God, it is simply because it did not want it badly enough or have a sure enough confidence that he would get it. But Elijah was a man who was afraid of the queen and who once asked the Lord to end his life. If he is the example of the righteous man whose prayers work and accomplish much, then this is not what “a righteous one” means in v16.

For the same reason, this cannot mean someone whose behavior is good enough. For, that was not true of Elijah. In fact, v17 emphasizes the opposite—that Elijah was “a man with a nature like ours.”

Yes, we know from chapter 2 that genuine faith will result in works, but it is that faith (and not those works) that is the key to what it means to be “righteous” in v16. For, this guarantee—that our prayers are accomplishing much, that they are working—belongs to those whose righteousness is Jesus Christ Himself.

Jesus was the only worthy righteousness that Elijah could have, because he was a man of like nature with ours. And Jesus is the only worthy righteousness that we can have.

What does our prayer accomplish, then, with Christ as our righteousness? Whatever God has decided is best, praise God! How powerful are our prayers? Powerful enough to bring three years and six months of drought. Our prayers are powered by the same power that Elijah's were. And powerful enough to make it rain for the first time in three and a half years. Our prayers are powered by the same power that Elijah's were.

And so as Elijah “in prayer, prayed,” so also we “in prayer, pray.” That is to say that we pray earnestly, we really pray when we come to pray, seeking and obtaining from God, not merely performing some outward exercise.

Whenever we pray, through faith in Jesus, our prayers are working. Period. If we cling to Him for eternity, and live this life in light of eternity, then we have this sure guarantee: our prayers are working, because Jesus's own righteousness is their worthiness, their effectiveness, their accomplishing much.

This is the prayer of faith. Not to know that we will get whatever we name. But to know that whenever we pray in Jesus's name, that prayer is working; that prayer is accomplishing much! What a privilege it is to be able to know that much is accomplished every time we go to our knees!