

The Power of God

1 Chronicles 29:10-19

This is week four in the 40 Days of Prayer and in our series on the Attributes of God. The desire of the leadership in the C&MA is to help us grow in prayer by helping us grow in our understanding of the God to whom we pray. And that's my desire as well in preaching these sermons. So we're not just looking at the Attributes of God, we're looking at them in relation to prayer. And this week we turn our attention to the Power of God.

When I think about the power of God and prayer, I think about a lot of things. My mind begins to think of stories from the Old Testament and New Testament where people pray and God's power shows up in amazing ways. There's a great story of Elijah who's facing off with the prophets of Baal on Mt. Carmel. They had set up two altars and whoever's God could light their sacrifice on fire would be the winner. The prophets of Baal prayed like crazy and nothing happened. Elijah was even making fun of them. But when it was his turn, he dumped a bunch of water on everything and then prayed and a fire bomb from heaven came and burned everything up, including the water. Prayer and the power of God!

In the New Testament I think of all the stories of Jesus and the Apostles. There was a time when Peter was arrested and likely going to be put to death. But it says that the church made earnest prayer for him, and that night Peter's chains fell off, prison doors swung open, and Peter was led out of prison by an angel past all kinds of guards. The Bible has a lot of stories like that – prayer and the power of God.

So I think about those things, but I also think about when we pray for things like that, or even much smaller, and our prayers aren't answered. We pray for help or healing or transformation and nothing happens. That seems to happen a lot and it can be confusing and discouraging. It doesn't feel like we see God's power when we pray like we see in the Bible. Where are the miracles? How could people like Elijah and the prophets and Paul and the Apostles seem to have so much confidence when they prayed? There are a lot of possible answers to these questions, but I think it starts with a biblical

understanding of God's power and prayer, so that's what we're going to look at this morning.

To understand the power of God, we need to think about how it relates to the sovereignty of God and the eternal purpose and will of God that we looked at last week. God's power is directly related to those things. Last week we saw that God's sovereignty is his absolute ownership, dominion and authority to rule over his kingdom (which is all of creation), and he rules in order to accomplish his eternal purpose and will. He created all things according to his purpose and will and he is ruling over all things as Sovereign Lord to bring his purpose and will to fulfillment.

We talked about that purpose and will last week and how God has been revealing and unfolding that throughout history. It was a mystery for ages until the revelation of Christ, but then it was revealed to his Apostles who wrote the New Testament. It's in their writings that we see that God's eternal purpose and will is the unending praise of his glorious grace by all those redeemed in Christ in a new heaven and new earth forever and ever.

So God is ruling all of creation to bring that to fulfillment and the way he does that is by his power. His power is his unhindered strength and might to rule his kingdom to accomplish his eternal purpose and will. So his power is a critical aspect of his sovereignty. A king isn't much of a king if he doesn't have the power to carry out his purpose and will. But God does. He's a King who does whatever pleases him with everything he created in order to accomplish his purpose and will. And he's able to do that because of his power. We see him demonstrate his power in many ways – in creating the universe, in changing lives, in directing the course of history, in raising up rulers and nations and tearing them down, in triumphing over Satan and demons, and in all kinds of miracles. God is using his power to accomplish his purpose and will.

1 Chron. 29:10-13 is a great prayer of David about the power of God that he prayed after gathering a huge offering to build a temple for the Lord:

“Therefore David blessed the Lord in the presence of all the assembly. And David said: “Blessed are you, O Lord, the God of Israel our father, forever and ever. ¹¹Yours, O Lord, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the victory and the majesty, for all that is in the heavens and in the earth is yours.

Yours is the kingdom, O Lord, and you are exalted as head above all. ¹² Both riches and honor come from you, and you rule over all. In your hand are power and might, and in your hand it is to make great and to give strength to all. ¹³ And now we thank you, our God, and praise your glorious name.”

So King David understood the power of God. And I think we do too. Certainly not perfectly, but I think we understand and believe that God has the power to do all things according to his will. I think we also know and believe he can answer any of our prayers, no matter how big they are.

But let's think about our prayers and God's answers to them:

- I pray that you would give me a good day today...
- I pray that you would protect my children...
- I pray that you would heal my dad...
- I pray that you would give me the promotion at work...
- I pray that you would help me overcome my addiction...
- I pray that you would save my marriage...
- I pray that you would heal me...
- I pray that you would make it rain...
- I pray for good weather for my wedding...
- I pray that you would bring my daughter back to you...
- I pray that you would turn the hearts of our governing authorities to you...
- I pray that you would bring revival to this land...

Has God ever used his power to answer your prayers? I think all of us would probably say “yes.” But has God ever not used his power to answer your prayers? In other words, has God ever said “no” to your prayers? Again, I think all of us would say “yes.”

We have all kinds of prayers and requests and God has all kinds of power, and sometimes he says “yes,” but sometimes he says “no,” and that can be a real struggle. What are we to do with that? A lot of people think they have the answers to those questions. A lot of books are written and sermons are preached about what's missing in your prayers and what you can do to access more of God's power in prayer. And I want to urge you to be cautious about those resources. And I want to show you why.

We just looked at the first part of a prayer by King David. Now I want to read the second part of that prayer. He just praised God for his sovereign greatness and infinite power, and now he continues...

Read 1 Chronicles 29:14-19.

“But who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able thus to offer willingly? For all things come from you, and of your own have we given you. ¹⁵ For we are strangers before you and sojourners, as all our fathers were. Our days on the earth are like a shadow, and there is no abiding. ¹⁶ O Lord our God, all this abundance that we have provided for building you a house for your holy name comes from your hand and is all your own. ¹⁷ I know, my God, that you test the heart and have pleasure in uprightness. In the uprightness of my heart I have freely offered all these things, and now I have seen your people, who are present here, offering freely and joyously to you. ¹⁸ O Lord, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, our fathers, keep forever such purposes and thoughts in the hearts of your people, and direct their hearts toward you. ¹⁹ Grant to Solomon my son a whole heart that he may keep your commandments, your testimonies, and your statutes, performing all, and that he may build the palace for which I have made provision.”

Now, if you know your biblical history, you’re realizing some things here. You know that God did not grant most of these requests. The people didn’t end up having hearts for the Lord and quickly turned away from him. Solomon also didn’t have a whole heart for God and didn’t keep his commandments. He brought all kinds of wickedness into Israel, which is why the kingdom was divided. The only prayer that was really answered with a “yes” was that Solomon ended up building the temple that David had taken the offering for. So David made good requests and God had all the power needed to bring about those things, but he didn’t. What do you do with that?

A lot of books and sermons out there will have you critique your prayers to find out what you did wrong or what’s missing and have you add something different to so that next time God will use his power to answer our prayers. But if you do that here with David’s prayer, it’s pretty hard to find fault. I think this is an exemplary prayer. You could learn a lot about how to pray by looking at this prayer. It is filled with praise, humility, and truth, coming from a king

who had a heart after God's own heart. He was leading his people faithfully and they too were eager to follow the Lord. This is a prayer of faith, trusting in the Lord. David acknowledges that the offerings and the desire to give those offerings have ultimately come from God. So he's giving God the credit he deserves. It is a prayer according to the will of God – asking that God's chosen people and their future king would walk in obedience and have hearts fully devoted to the Lord. This is a great prayer that checks all the boxes of how we should pray, and yet God did not use his power to answer most of these requests.

I'm using this prayer because I think it can help us grow in our understanding of the power of God and prayer. We need to see that even if we're asking for the right things in the right way and have the right attitude, there are times when God will not answer our prayers.

Sometimes he does. We saw one example last week. The disciples prayed for courage to keep preaching in the face of growing danger and God gave them courage. God answered Elijah's prayer on Mt. Carmel like I mentioned earlier. He answered the disciples' prayers when Peter was in prison. But he didn't answer most of David's prayers that we just looked at. He didn't answer Paul's prayers to remove his thorn in the flesh.

If you walk through the pages of Scripture you are going to find all kinds of examples where God's people either explicitly or by implication prayed good prayers for good things and sometimes God used his power to answer and sometimes he didn't.

When it comes to the power of God and prayer, there is a struggle and that struggle is real. You've felt it, I've felt it, and I would bet that every believer that prays has felt it. What are we supposed to do with that struggle? There are two responses I've seen that I think are wrong, and one I think is right.

I brought this up earlier when I cautioned you what to look out for. Some people respond by refusing to accept "no" as an answer. They seem to believe that you just have to check all the boxes about how to pray rightly, and if you do that, then God will answer your prayers. So: pray in Jesus' name, pray according to God's will, pray in faith, pray with confidence, pray with

persistence, pray Scripture, pray on your knees, pray with raised hands, pray with laying on of hands, anointing with oil. The Bible teaches all these things and it's like they're trying to put a master prayer key together just right so it will open all the tumblers and unlock God's power and he will pour out answers to all of their prayers. You keep adding more things or trying something different. But sometimes God will not answer your prayers, no matter how good they may be. I hope David's prayer showed you that.

Other people respond to the struggle in quite the opposite way, and that's by essentially giving up on prayer. When God doesn't answer our prayers the way we think he ought to, it can be really disappointing, confusing, and discouraging, so eventually we throw up our hands and wonder why we should even pray. If we're asking for good things and we don't see God answering our prayers, prayer feels like a gamble and the odds aren't in our favor.

Both of these responses are wrong because they approach prayer the wrong way. Prayer is not about getting results. The goal isn't success or power. Yes, we need to grow in learning how to pray rightly and that's why we have teaching in the Bible about prayer, but prayer isn't about getting answers or unlocking the power of God.

Then what is the correct response? Rather than giving up or trying to figure out the secret to unlocking the power of prayer, I believe we need to submit to the sovereignty of God and keep praying as the Bible teaches us to pray, and do it for the right reasons – because the purpose of prayer is not to get answers or wield God's power, it's to enter into deeper fellowship with him.

Prayer is about fellowship with God – a God who is holy, unchangeable, sovereign, and powerful. It's about connecting with him, growing in relationship, wrestling with him, going deeper, growing in faith. Thanking him when he says "yes" and seeking to understand him more when he says "no." It's about humility and recognizing that he is God and we are not. His ways are higher than our ways. Though he is always good, he can actually use sickness, failure, evil, evil people, and sin to accomplish his will, just as much as he can use health, success, righteousness, righteous people, and obedience.

We saw last week that he used the evil actions of evil men to accomplish his good purpose behind crucifying the Son of God. That doesn't make sense to us. We can't predict that. We're never going to ask for it. We can't make sense of it when we or someone we love goes through suffering or when the nation we live in keeps sliding further into evil. But when things don't turn around like we pray they would, it's not because we haven't checked all the right boxes. It's because God is God and we are not.

He wants us to pray not so that we can try to figure out how to get him to do what we think he should do, but so that we'll grow deeper in fellowship with him.