



ELIJAH, THE PRAYING PROPHET

James 5:16-18 (KJV)

¹⁶ ... The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.

¹⁷ Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain: and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months. ¹⁸ And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit.

James 5:16-18 (MSG)

¹⁶ ... The prayer of a person living right with God is something powerful to be reckoned with. ¹⁷ Elijah, for instance, human just like us, prayed hard that it wouldn't rain, and it didn't—not a drop for three and a half years. ¹⁸ Then he prayed that it would rain, and it did. The showers came and everything started growing again.

James 5:16-18 (YLT)

¹⁶ ...very strong is a working supplication of a righteous man; ¹⁷ Elijah was a man like affected as we, and with prayer he did pray--not to rain, and it did not rain upon the land three years and six months; ¹⁸ and again he did pray, and the heaven did give rain, and the land did bring forth her fruit.

James 5:16 (Phillips NT)

¹⁶ ...Tremendous power is made available through a good man's earnest prayer. Do you remember Elijah? He was a man like us but he prayed earnestly that it should not rain. In fact, not a drop fell on the land for three and a half years. Then he prayed again, the heavens gave the rain and the earth sprouted with vegetation as usual.

James 5:16-18 (GW)

¹⁶ ...Prayers offered by those who have God's approval are effective.

¹⁷ Elijah was human like us. Yet, when he prayed that it wouldn't rain, no rain fell on the ground for three-and-a-half years.

¹⁸ Then he prayed again. It rained, and the ground produced crops.

James 5:16-17 (NIV)

¹⁶ ...The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.

¹⁷ Elijah was a man just like us. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years.

ELIJAH is preeminently the elder of the prophets. The crown, the throne and the scepter are his. His garments are white with flame. He seems exalted in his fiery and prayerful nature, as a being seemingly superhuman, but the New Testament places him alongside of us as man of like nature with us. Instead of placing himself outside the sphere of humanity, in the marvelous results of his praying, it points to him as an example to be imitated and as inspiration to stimulate us. To pray like Elijah, and to have results like Elijah, is the crying need of the times.

Elijah had learned the lesson of prayer, and had graduated in that divine school ere we know him. Somewhere in the secret places, on mountain or in plain, he had been alone with God, an intercessor against the debasing idolatry of Ahab.

Mightily had his prayers prevailed with God. How confidently and well assured were the answers to his praying.

He had been talking with God about vengeance. He was the embodiment of his times. Those times were times of vengeance. The intercessor was not to be clothed with an olive branch with its fillet of wood, the symbol of a suppliant for mercy, but with fire, the symbol of justice and the messenger of wrath. How abruptly does he come before us in the presence of Ahab! Well assured and with holy boldness does he declare before the astonished, cowering king his message of fearful import, a message gained by his earnest praying,—“in praying he prayed that it might not rain,” and God did not deny his prayer. “As the Lord God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years but according to my word.”

The secret of his praying and the character of the man are found in the words, “Before whom I stand.” We are here reminded of Gabriel’s words to Zacharias in informing this priest of the coming of a son to him and his wife in their old age: “I am Gabriel that standeth in the presence of God.” The archangel Gabriel had scarcely more unflinching devotion, more courage, and more readiness of obedience, and more jealousy of God’s honor, than Elijah. What projecting power do we see in his prayer! “And it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months.” What omnipotent forces which can command the powers of nature! “Not dew nor rain.” What man is this who dares utter such a claim or assert such a power? If his claim be false, he is a fanatic or a madman. If his claim be true, he has stayed the benevolent arm of Omnipotence, and put himself, by God’s leave, in God’s place. The accursed and burnt-up land and the fiery, rainless and dewless days and nights, attest the truth of his saying, and prove the sternness, strength, firmness and passion of the man who holds back the clouds and stays the blessed visitation of the rain. Elijah is his name, and this attests the truth of that name, “My God is Jehovah.”

His prayers have the power to stay the benignant course of nature. He stands in God’s stead in this matter. The sober, passionless, unimaginative James, the brother of our Lord, in his Epistle, says to us: “See what prayer can do, by Elijah! Pray as Elijah prayed. Let the righteous man put forth to its fullest extent the energy of prayer. Let saints and sinners, angels and devils, see and feel the mighty potencies of prayer. See how the prayer of a good man has power and influence, and avails with God!”

No sham praying was that of Elijah, no mere performance, no spiritless, soulless, official praying was it. Elijah was in Elijah's praying. The whole man, with all his fiery forces, was in it. Almighty God to him was real. Prayer to him was the means of projecting God in full force on the world, in order to vindicate His name, establish His own being, to avenge His blasphemed name and violated law, and to vindicate His servants.

Instead of "prayed earnestly," in [James 5:17](#), the Revised Version has it, "In his prayer he prayed," or "with prayer he prayed." That is, with all the combined energies of prayer he prayed.

Elijah's praying was strong, insistent, and resistless in its elements of power. Feeble praying secures no results and brings neither glory to God nor good to man.

Elijah learned new and higher lessons of prayer while hidden away by God and with God when he was by the brook Cherith. He was doubtless communing with God while Ahab was searching all lands for him. After a while he was ordered to Sarepta, where God had commanded a widow to sustain him. He went there for the widow's good as well as for his own. A benefit to Elijah and a signal good to the widow were the results of Elijah's going. While this woman provided for him, he provided for the woman. Elijah's prayers did more for the woman than the woman's hospitality did for Elijah. Great trials awaited the widow and great sorrows too. Her widowhood and her poverty tell of her struggles and her sorrows. Elijah was there to relieve her poverty and to assuage her griefs.

Here is the interesting account:

"And it came to pass that after these things, the son of the woman, the mistress of the house, fell sick; and his sickness was sore, that there was no breath left in him.

"And she said unto Elijah, What have I do to with thee, O thou man of God? Art thou come unto me to call my sin to remembrance and to slay my son?"

"And he said unto her, Give me thy son. And he took him out of her bosom, and carried him up into a loft, where he abode, and laid him upon his own bed.

"And he cried unto the Lord, and said, O Lord my God, hast thou also brought evil upon the widow with whom I sojourn by slaying her son?"

"And he stretched himself upon the child three times, and cried unto the Lord, and said, O Lord my God, I pray thee let this child's soul come into him again.

"And the Lord heard the voice of Elijah, and the soul of the child came into him again, and he revived.

“And Elijah took the child and brought him down out of the chamber into the house, and delivered him unto his mother. And Elijah said, See, thy son liveth.

“And the woman said to Elijah, Now by this I know that thou art a man of God, and that the word of the Lord in thy mouth is truth.”

Elijah's prayer enters regions where prayer had never gone before. The awful, mysterious and powerful regions of the dead are now invaded by the presence and demands of prayer. Jesus Christ refers to Elijah's going to this widow as mainly, if not solely, for her good. Elijah's presence and praying keep the woman from starving and brings her son back from death. Surely no sorrow is like the bitterness of the loss of an only son. With what assured confidence Elijah faces the conditions! There is no hesitancy in his actions, and there is no pause in his faith. He takes the dead son to his own room, and alone with God he makes the issue. In that room God meets him and the struggle is with God alone. The struggle is too intense and too sacred for companionship or for spectator. The prayer is made to God and the issue is with God. The child has been taken by God, and God rules in the realms of death. In His hands are the issues of life and death. Elijah believed that God had taken the child's spirit, and that God could as well restore that spirit. God answered Elijah's prayer. The answer was the proof of Elijah's mission from God, and of the truth of God's Word. The dead child brought to life was a sure conviction of this truth: "Now by this I know that thou art a man of God, and that the word of the Lord in thy mouth is truth. Answers to prayer are the evidences of the being of God and of the truth of His Word.

The immortal test of Elijah made in the presence of an apostate king, and in the face of a backslidden nation and an idolatrous priesthood on Mount Carmel, is a sublime exhibition of faith and prayer. In the contest the prophets of Baal had failed. No fire from heaven falls from heaven in answer to their frantic cries. Elijah, in great quietness of spirit and with confident assurance, calls Israel to him. He repairs the wasted altar of God, the altar of sacrifice and of prayer, and puts the pieces of the bullock in order on the altar. He then uses every preventive against any charge of deception. Every thing is flooded with water. Then Elijah prays a model prayer, remarkable for its clearness, its simplicity and its utmost candor. It is noted for its brevity and its faith.

Read the account given in the Scriptures:

“And it came to pass at the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice, that Elijah the prophet came near and said, Lord God of Abraham, Isaac and of Israel,

let it be known this day that thou art God in Israel, and that I am thy servant, and that I have done all these things at thy word.

“Hear me, O Lord, hear me, that this people may know that thou art the Lord God, and that thou hast turned their heart back again.

“Then the fire of the Lord fell, and consumed the burnt sacrifice, and the wood, and the stones, and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench.

“And when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces; and they said, The Lord, he is God; The Lord, he is God.”

Elijah had been dealing directly with God as before. True prayer always deals with God. This prayer of Elijah was to determine the existence of the true God, and the answer direct from God settles the question. The answer is also the credentials of Elijah’s divine mission and the evidence that God deals with men. If we had more of Elijah’s praying, marvels would not be the marvels that they are now to us. God would not be so strange, so far away in being and so feeble in action. Everything is tame and feeble because our praying is so tame and feeble.

God said to Elijah, “Go show thyself to Ahab, and I will send rain on the earth.” Elijah acted promptly on the divine order, and showed himself to Ahab. He had made his issue with Ahab, Israel and Baal. The whole current of national feeling had turned back to God. The day was fading into the evening shades. No rain had come. But Elijah did not fold his arms and say the promise had failed, but gave point and fulfillment to the promise.

Here is the Scripture record with the result given:

“And Elijah said unto Ahab, Get thee up, eat and drink, for there is a sound of abundance of rain.

“So Ahab went up to eat and to drink. And Elijah went up to the top of Carmel. And he cast himself down upon the earth, and put his face between his knees.

“And said to his servant, Go up now, look toward the sea. And he went up and looked, and said, There is nothing. And he said, Go again seven times.

“And it came to pass at the seventh time that he said, Behold there riseth a little cloud out of the sea, like a man’s hand. And he said, Go up, say unto Ahab, Prepare thy chariot, and get thee down, that the rain stop thee not.

“And it came to pass in the meanwhile, that the heaven was black with clouds and wind, and there was a great rain. And Ahab rode and went to Jezreel.

“And the hand of the Lord was on Elijah.”

Then it was, as James records, “And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit.”

Elijah's importunate, fiery praying and God's promise brought the rain. Prayer carries the promise to its gracious fulfillment. It takes persistent and persevering prayer to give to the promise its largest and most gracious results. In this instance it was expectant prayer, watchful of results, looking for the answer. Elijah had the answer in the small cloud like a man's hand. He had the inward assurance of the answer even before he had the rain. How Elijah's praying shames our feeble praying! His praying brought things to pass. It vindicated the existence and being of God, brought conviction to dull and sluggish consciences, and proved that God was still God in the nation. Elijah's praying turned a whole nation back to God, ordered the moving of the clouds, and directed the falling of the rain. It called down fire from heaven to prove the existence of God or to destroy God's enemies.

The praying of the Elder Prophet of Israel was clothed in his robes of fire. The golden crown was on his head, and his censer was full and fragrant with the flame, the melody and the perfume of prayer. What wonderful power clothed him on this occasion! It was no wonder that Elisha cried out as he saw this fiery prophet of the Lord enter the chariot for his heavenly ride, "My father! my father! The chariot of Israel and the horsemen thereof!" But chariots and armies could not begin to do as much for Israel as did this praying Elijah. Prayers are omnipotent forces, worldwide and heaven-reaching.

Where are the praying ones of modern times of fiery faith who can incense Elijah's prayers? We need at this time rulers in the Church who can add to the force, flame and fragrance of Elijah's praying by their own prayers.

Elijah could touch nothing but by prayer. God was with him mightily because he was mighty in prayer.

In the contest with the prophets of Baal, he makes the issue clearly and positively to determine the true God, as one to be made by prayer. Does God live? Is the Bible a revelation from Him? How often in these days are those questions rising? How often do they need to be settled? An appeal by prayer is the only Settlement to them. Where is the trouble? Not in God, but in our praying. The proof of God and of His being is that He answers prayer. It takes the faith and prayer of Elijah to settle the question. Where are the Elijahs in the Church of the present day? Where are the men of like passions as he, who can pray as he prayed? We have thousands of men of like passions, but where are the men of like praying as he was? Notice with what calm, assured confidence he stakes the issue and builds the altar. How calm and pointed is his prayer on that occasion!

Instead of such praying being out of the range of New Testament principles and moderation, this very praying of Elijah is pressed as an example to be imitated and as an illustration of what prayer can do when performed by the right men in the right way. Elijah's results could be secured if we had more Elijah men to do the praying.

Elijah prayed really, truly and earnestly. How much of praying there is at the present time which is not real praying, but is a mere shell, shucks, and mere words! Much of it might well be termed non-praying. The world is full of such praying. It goes nowhere, it avails nothing, it brings no returns. In fact, no returns nor results are expected.

The requisites of true prayer are the requisites of scriptural, vital, personal religion. They are the requisites of real religious service in this life. Primary among these requisites is that in serving, we serve. So in praying, we must pray. Truth and heart reality, these are the core, the substance, the sum, the heart of prayer. There are no possibilities in prayer without we really pray in all simplicity, reality and trueness. Prayerless praying—how common, how popular, how delusive and vain!

The Complete Works of E. M. Bounds .