

Proof #8 Jesus' Priority of Prayer Proves His Relationship with the Father
Mark 1:35-39

It is very early in the morning.

In fact, it is the middle of the night.

There is no faint glow of the rising sun, no sound of roosters greeting the soon coming dawn, no movement in the streets as vendors prepare for the day.

The world sleeps and the Savior of the world slips out to pray.

The day before was the Sabbath.

It had been quite a day, a day in which Jesus of Nazareth demonstrated divine authority as the Christ, the Son of God.

In the hours of that day, Jesus taught with authority over the word in the synagogue.

Jesus spoke with authority over the spiritual realm and released a demon-possessed man from captivity.

Jesus acted with authority over the natural world and raised a woman from her sick bed.

And that evening, as the Sabbath day passed into the first day of the week, the entire town gathered at the door of the home where Jesus was staying and brought to him all who were sick or oppressed by demons.

With the authority invested in Him by the Spirit of God on behalf of the One True God, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, Jesus the Christ, the Son of God acted in the power of God for the glory of God in the love of God.

He healed many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons, whom He would not permit to speak because they knew Him.

You can imagine, if the whole town gathered at the door in the evening hours, and into the evening hours Jesus healed and ministered in the power and authority of the Father in the lives of broken people, how late the hour must have been when He retired to rest. And now we see Him, barely hours later, rising first not to face the challenges of a new day, but to spend the first hours of this new day in personal fellowship and communion with His Father in prayer.

Jesus, the Christ, the Son of God, the Savior of the world, the One chosen by God and anointed by God to teach and preach and heal and deliver and minister and live and die and rise again, with a full agenda of service to the mission and purpose set by the Living God, starts the day not with a "to do list" or a power breakfast, but with undistracted time in the presence of the Father.

Father God is always the priority for the Son of God and the sons of God.

"Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, he departed and went out to a desolate place, and there He prayed." Mark will tell us a great many things about the activities of Jesus in the chapters to come.

We will see in this gospel record that Jesus heals, but first He prays.

Jesus teaches, but first He prays.

Jesus feeds thousands, but first He prays.

Jesus expels demons, but first He prays.

Jesus gives sight to the blind,
words to the mute,
hearing to the deaf,
mobility to the lame,
hope to the hopeless,
peace to the restless,
joy to the powerless,
love to the worthless.

He does all this and more, but first, first, Jesus prays.

Now, look closely at Mark's first accounting of the priority of prayer in the life of Christ. Look and see. Jesus rose very early in the morning, while it was still dark, left the house, went to a desolate place where He would remain undisturbed as the world around Him awakened to the new dawn that was coming, and there, there in that lonely place, there in that quiet hour, He prayed. And look! **It looks like nothing happened!**

The conquerors were still conquering.

The brutal Romans were still in control of the land God Himself promised to Abraham and his offspring forever.

Consumers were still bent on consuming.

The disciples search to find Jesus. Why? Because everyone was looking for Him.

And why were they looking for Him?

Because they liked Him? No.

Because they wanted to spend time with Him, get to know Him, appreciated Him for the Person that He is, the Christ, the Son of God? No!

They sought Him because they wanted more from Him.

They wanted the benefits that were theirs when He acted in the power and authority of God.

They wanted the healings.

They wanted the deliverances.

They wanted the freedom.

They wanted the blessings of God, but they did not really want the Son of God.

They wanted the goods but not the gospel.

They wanted the gifts by not the Giver.

Jesus prayed, and yet, the world seems to have remained unchanged.

The poor were still poor.

The sick were still sick.

The lame were still lame.

The dead were still dead.

Captives were still captive.

Sinners still sinned.

Death still reigned.

The Son of God rose very early in the morning, while it was still dark. He departed and went to a

desolate place, and there He prayed. The Christ prayed. The Son of God prayed. And it seems, despite His prayers, **nothing happened.**

I can hear your voices in my heart, you people of faith who know better.

I can hear you saying, “Now wait a minute, Pastor. Something ain’t right here!”

You are correct.

I have led you to this point for a reason. I have intentionally focused your attention on the immediate impact of Jesus’ praying, that **nothing appears to have changed as a result of His prayers, because many faithful Christians are asking this morning, “Lord, why is it, when we pray, nothing happens?”**

Some of you have been praying for years for loved ones to come to Christ, and those loved ones seem as resistant and unrepentant as ever, and you wonder why, when I pray, does nothing change.

Many of you have seen and heard and experienced the impact of current events.

You have prayed against racism, you have prayed for release from COVID-19, you have prayed for protection from disaster, and still a black man in Minneapolis is murdered by a white cop sending the city into a rage that spreads across the nation.

You have prayed for deliverance from a novel virus for which humans have no natural immunity, and still the virus spreads.

You have prayed that disasters might not come near your dwelling but hurricanes rage, tornadoes twist, earthquakes shake, fires burn, droughts destroy, famine starves, power oppresses, greed enslaves, and people fail.

You pray, but nothing happens, and your faith cries out to God, “Why? Why, when I pray, does nothing happen?”

Dearly beloved, look again. Look even more closely at Mark’s account of Jesus middle of the night prayer retreat with God.

Look and consider what happens when the disciples find Jesus that morning as He prays. They explain the reason they have sought Him out is because everyone in that place is looking for Him.

They want Him to stay with them.

They want Him to continue to serve them.

They want to be the focus of His attention and grace.

They want Him to devote Himself to their favor, to their good opinion of Him.

They want to be the reason He acts in power and authority.

The temptation Jesus faces in this hour is to abandon His Father and take on for Himself the role of popular personage among the prevailing population.

The temptation Jesus faces is the temptation humanity faced at the tower of Babel when they decided to remain in one place even though God had commanded them to fill the earth.

It is the temptation the disciples and the church will face later when, though commanded to take the gospel to the ends of the earth, they begin to centralize and remain in Jerusalem and God

sends a persecution to get them moving.

The temptation Jesus faces in this hour is to abandon the Father's mission to fill the earth with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord and to remain in one single community that selfishly fawns over Him for what they can gain from Him.

The temptation Jesus faces is to abandon the role of the divine Christ, the Son of God, and become the consumed Clown, the puppet of men.

But, because Jesus prays, because He has feasted on love and grace in the presence of the Father, **something does happen!** Listen to Jesus' response to His disciples:

Mark 1:38-39 (ESV) ³⁸ *And he said to them, "Let us go on to the next towns, that I may preach there also, for that is why I came out."* ³⁹ *And he went throughout all Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and casting out demons.*

What happens? Jesus overcomes the temptation to abandon His God-given mission.

What happens? Jesus commits to the Father's plan for the Father's glory.

What happens? Jesus embraces God's will!

What happens? Jesus defeats the world!

What happens? Jesus remains in the Spirit.

What happens? **Jesus demonstrates that the effect of prayer is not primarily what happens in the world but what happens in us as we pray.**

Too often we are disappointed in the outcome of our prayer because we are looking for results in the wrong place. You should pray for the family of George Floyd and you should pray for an end to the system of racism that enslaves the whole world, but the results you should look for are not out in the wide world and the hearts of others, but in your world, in your heart.

Racism is one of many expressions of sinful pride ruling in the hearts of sinful men.

It is one of many attempts of the sinful self to exalt itself over others on account of observable differences.

As you pray about and against racism, expect that God in His wisdom and mercy will point out to you all the ways you exalt yourself or excuse yourself based on your perception that somehow you are better than others and they deserve the disdain you have for them.

God will change racism in the world as He changes the hearts of His people into the heart of Jesus, and as He changes their hearts, so He will change their actions into the actions of Jesus.

The kingdom of God will one day be established in the whole world, but today His kingdom is being established in the hearts and lives of those men and women and boys and girls who answer to the call of the Spirit to faith in God through faith in Jesus Christ. So then, if we are looking for God to act with authority relative to our prayers, we ought to look first in the place where His power and authority are already being established, our own hearts, our own lives.

Prayer is not a means of bending the Father's will to our will. You will be perpetually disappointed in prayer if you think by prayer you can influence God to do your will, if you think by prayer you can make God make things happen.

Captain Jean-Luc Picard, of the Starship Enterprise, would often hear suggestions from his first officer. When the first officer's suggestions aligned with the captain's own purposes, the captain would famously say to Commander Riker: "Make it so, Number One!"

That is television.

That is not prayer.

We cannot approach God as though we are the captain and he is our first officer.

We cannot approach prayer with any idea that God invites us to instruct Him or write an agenda for Him and that somehow our "Amen" is the declaration that Number One should make it so.

There is a sentence fragment in an opening paragraph of the second section of the Westminster Confession of Faith that summarizes an important revelation of God in His word on this point of prayer. The paragraph reads this way:

There is but one only, living, and true God, who is infinite in being and perfection, a most pure spirit, invisible, without body, parts, or passions; immutable, immense, eternal, incomprehensible, almighty, most wise, most holy, most free, most absolute; working all things according to the counsel of his own immutable and most righteous will, for his own glory; most loving, gracious, merciful, long-suffering, abundant in goodness and truth, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin; the rewarder of them that diligently seek him; and withal, most just, and terrible in his judgments, hating all sin, and who will by no means clear the guilty.

There's a whole lot of gospel truth in those words and you might have missed the phrase that relates to prayer and praying, so let me point it out to you. It is the phrase *working all things according to the counsel of his own immutable, and most righteous will, for his own glory*. That phrase summarizes verses like:

Psalm 115:3 (ESV) *Our God is in the heavens; he does all that he pleases.*

Isaiah 46:8-10 (ESV) ⁸ *Remember this and stand firm, recall it to mind, you transgressors, ⁹ remember the former things of old; 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,*

Ephesians 1:11 (ESV) *In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will,*

These verses reveal to us that God is not forced to action by any external force, power, or stimulus.

God's behavior in all things at all times is determined by God's own character and is a manifestation of God's own will.

God acts according to what He is in His nature. He is righteous. He is sovereign. He is free.

That means that God works all things according to the counsel of His own will in accordance with His own nature, His own character.

He does not work things out according to your will or according to my will.

God does not work in accordance with majority opinion or minority mandates.

God does not rule in the world by referendum nor act on the basis of popularity.

What God wants, His will, determines how He works.

God's choices and actions are determined by His omniscience, righteousness, holiness, and the rest of His attributes.

He will not act according to a lesser being's desire, opinion, or counsel, but according to His own counsel, His own will.

We must understand from this that no prayer of man, no matter how faithful or faith-filled, causes God to change His mind and make something happen what was not already the will of God in the first place!

There is no lack of wisdom in God that our prayer can supply.

There is no lack of information in God that our prayer can provide.

There is no lack of instruction in God that a prayer of ours can fill.

We have no wisdom that is lacking in God's own counsel.

No prayer of ours will change God's mind and cause Him to act in any way He has not already planned to act.

Some might say, If God is already determined to act in a specific way, and no prayer of ours can influence His action, then why pray?

The easy answer is to say that we pray because God commands His people to pray.

That answer is easy, and true, but incomplete.

We pray both because God has commanded us to pray and because we understand that the purpose of prayer

is not to change God's mind but to change our mind,

to bring us into communion with Him,

to come to our heavenly Father in love and in trust and in joy and share with Him what is in and on our heart so that He can mold our heart into conformity with His own heart and with His own will.

God uses our prayers as He determined to do before we ever prayed.

God uses our prayers to accomplish His plan.

Our prayer is part of God's plan, and His response is also a gracious and wonderful part of His plan.

God's revealed mission within the realm of creation is that the earth will be filled with the experiential knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.

The work God does in His people, in our hearts when we pray, molding our thinking and our willing into conformity with His thoughts and His will, and our actions to His through our thinking and will, is a means by which God fills the earth with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord.

What happens on account of Jesus' prayer?

Because Jesus prioritizes prayer in His life He is encouraged and empowered to maintain His faithfulness to the Father and the Father's purpose for His life.

Selfishness and pride are defeated through prayer and His sinless life is protected and advanced through prayer.

R.C. Sproul in his little booklet called, "Does Prayer Change Things," opens with this insight:

Prayer prompts and nurtures obedience, putting the heart into the proper "frame of mind" to desire obedience.

Jean Calvin, in the Institutes of the Christian Religion, wrote this about prayer:

Still it is very important for us to call upon him:

First, that our hearts may be fired with a zealous and burning desire ever to seek, love, and serve him, while we become accustomed in every need to flee to him as to a sacred anchor.

Secondly, that there may enter our hearts no desire and no wish at all of which we should be ashamed to make him a witness, while we learn to set all our wishes before his eyes, and even to pour out our whole hearts.

Thirdly, that we be prepared to receive his benefits with true gratitude of heart and thanksgiving, benefits that our prayer reminds us come from his hand.

Have you been wondering, God, why is it when I pray, nothing happens? Perhaps you have been looking in the wrong place for the results of your prayers. God will change the world through prayer, by changing your heart as you pray, and changing your life as you live out a new heart.

Pray more, love more, live more and see what happens when you pray.