

- When we last left off, we were in (what was my first time in 15 years), teaching a topical message series (if you can call it that)
 - That *topical message* addresses a very important topic: prayer!
 - The last time we were together, I spent a lot of time setting things up, and today we are going to do more of the same.
 - Having said that, we will be getting into a little more of “the meat” of the topic, but it’s still going to be (what I call) a setup Sunday.
 - To understand any topic (whether it be a scriptural one or a non-scriptural one), you must first have a baseline understanding of how most people in America view prayer and, more importantly, how most people in America view God!
 - Once we establish that understanding, then we can begin to venture into the actual categories/purpose and intent of prayer.
- You see, throughout my ministry, people have often inquired about prayer.
 - Primarily, they have asked whether I believe prayer changes things, or maybe even the harder question: Does prayer change God’s mind?
 - The answer to both those questions may confuse you because they both run congruent with one another.
 - Meaning, these questions are virtually the same in a sense, and therefore, you would think the answer would have to be the same for both questions.
 - That would be true for the most part, or maybe not!
 - You see, it really depends on what “Camp” you’re in.
 - Which is what leads you to believe what you believe about this topic in the first place.
 - In other words, it’s all about your paradigm regarding prayer: the lens through which you view prayer.
 - Another way to say it is that it’s all about your outlook, or maybe better said, your understanding of prayer.
- There are really two distinct groups or camps on the topic of prayer.
 - One camp says, we must pray if we want to change things in our lives or in the lives of others.
 - This camp often believes (either consciously or subconsciously) that whatever you pray for, you should receive.
 - Therefore, they would answer yes to both questions!
 - But if you don’t believe that, then the answer to the first question would be yes, and the answer to the second question would be no.
- Once again, the first question was: Does prayer change things?
 - And as I said, the answer for the first camp would be a resounding yes.
 - They would say, Absolutely, prayer changes things. I mean, why else pray?
- And then, as far as the second question goes, relating to God changing His mind through

prayer, the first camp would also say yes to that as well. At a minimum, they might say, well, yes, kind of, sort of, but not really.

- Often, they would say, I wouldn't go as far as saying we can change God's mind, but I do think we can have an impact on what happens, or maybe on the way it happens.
- This group, many times, will quote Scripture like:

James 4:3 You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend *it* on your pleasures.

John 14:13 “Whatever you ask in My name, that will I do, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son.

John 14:14 “If you ask Me anything in My name, I will do *it*.”

- Now, the problem with grabbing one off scriptures to reinforce your belief, especially as it relates to the purpose and intent of prayer, is that it does not consider “Context.”
 - As we know, context is essential.
 - Let me correct that statement. It's not just essential; you simply cannot interpret scripture any other way unless you stay 100 % in context.
 - And let me explain what I mean quickly. You see, if you don't stay in context with the entirety of the scriptures, the whole counsel of God (as the Apostle Paul called it), then you might as well quit studying your Bible.
 - As you try to study, you will often end your time in a particular letter or book with more questions than you have answers!
 - You also run the risk of becoming disheartened, disenfranchised, and some have even abandoned their faith!
- And why is that? Because without context, coupled with a complete understanding of God and His Sovereignty, meaning, a complete understanding of what it means to be the Creator of something, many times (not always), you will find yourself confused.
 - Primarily because it will appear the scriptures conflict with themselves.
 - But as we know, that is not true, because the Bible does not contradict itself!
- The Bible is a supernatural work of God, and our Lord weaved it together like a tapestry of sorts. It's all interwoven.
 - 66 books.
 - 44 authors (depending on who you ask).
 - An integrated message system of sorts, and it screams the same story over and over again, just in different ways.
 - It's the story of the Creator (Our God) who created all things. The universe, the earth, and everything in it (which obviously includes all people).
 - And we let me say, we are not 100 percent sure why God created the creation we all live in.

- All we know is that He created it. We are in it, and if we are believers, we are commanded to live and do certain things.
 - And guess what?
- Prayer is one of the things all believers are commanded to do, but there is a problem regarding this command.
 - Our modern society has hijacked this all-important tenet.
 - Meaning, we have Americanized it, and it's not just America, but America is certainly the leading proponent of this hijacking process.
- Now, what do I mean when I say Americanized prayer? What I mean is that just like with other things in America, we have taken prayer and made its intent and purpose our own.
 - We have done so with little to no regard for what the scriptures say concerning this topic.
 - Prayer in America, among other places, has become nothing more than a footnote. Something to say to people in hard times!
 - And the meaning and intent behind that footnote says, God will give us what we want.
 - He will answer our prayers, and all we must do is ask.
 - And then poof, just like "I Dream of Genie," our wish is His command!
 - But the question is: Is that how the scriptures portray prayer?
 - No, not at all.
 - We are going to get more into that real soon, but before we do, let's go back to the 2 questions I posed earlier.
- Does prayer change things? And does prayer change God's mind?
 - Earlier, I said the answer to the question depends on what camp you're in.
 - If you are in the first camp, the one that believes that God will answer our prayers, He's just waiting on us.
 - As if He's on go, ready, willing, and able to answer us in the affirmative, and all we must do is ask and pray diligently, and we will receive what we ask for.
 - If that's you, then the answer would be yes!
 - And of course, that same camp would say yes to the second question as well.
 - That we can change God's mind through prayer.
 - But what about the second camp? The ones who believe and understand the "Sovereignty of God."
 - Those who have studied and understand their position in this creation and who know and understand that this creation is not all about us, but rather it's all about God.
 - That our purpose and intent and existence on this earth is to serve and glorify Him in all we do.
 - That we are not the center of the universe, but rather God is!

- I am talking about those who work hard to emulate what Paul wrote in

2 Timothy 5:14 Remind *them* of these things, and solemnly charge *them* in the presence of God not to wrangle about words, which is useless *and leads* to the ruin of the hearers.

2 Timothy 5:15 Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth.

- For this camp, they would answer the first question with a resounding yes. Prayer is effectual and has an impact, but that answer comes with a caveat.
 - The caveat is that if we pray, we should pray in accordance with His Will, and then, at that point, our prayers will be answered.
 - And then on the second question: Do our prayers change God's mind?
 - The second camp would answer absolutely not!
 - And two weeks ago, we did a review of that question using logic as our baseline.
 - Logic, as we know, is a rule of Hermeneutics.
 - Hermeneutics are the rules we use to interpret any ancient document of antiquity, which includes Scripture.
- And logically speaking, we can easily ascertain that for the Creator to change His mind, He would need to learn something new.
 - Obtain some new knowledge that would make Him pause and think and say to Himself, "I never thought about that, so maybe I do need to change my mind."
 - As if the creator might say, "Okay, stop with all the praying, and I will change my mind.
 - I'll make it work, and you can have what you want, and I will try and make it work, relating to things I want.
 - You see, the problem with this thinking lies in that last statement, My statement about our Americanized prayer!
- The reason I say modern society has Americanized prayer is that this type of prayer life assumes God treats our prayers the same way our mother or father would treat any of our requests or petitions.
 - You know, where we beg, and beg, and beg until finally our parents relent.
 - The problem is that yes, our parents might relent, but they do so, knowing that our request might not be what's best for us.
 - And why do they do that? Well, for two reasons.
 - First, they relent because they want us to be happy in that moment. Therefore, as a means of instant gratification, coupled with keeping the peace (in a sense), our mother or fathers says yes.
 - And then second, they relent because even though they know our request is not what's best for us, per se, they think in the back of their mind, well, maybe it will all

work out.

- They lean in on that hope, hoping it will all work out, because obviously, parents do not know the future.
 - So, they employ the use of two reasoning tools, or maybe better said, the use of two twisted tools of logic to rationalize their decision.
- There are two types of logic in our world, and one of them is good, and the other is bad.
 - The first type of logic is a logic that uses worldly reasoning or pragmatism to arrive at a conclusion.
 - An example is the use of science to explain our creation.
 - Science (according to scientists) is empirical. Meaning, you can verify it through observation, and many times you can even touch it.
 - Another example is a logic that uses a “Law” to confirm whatever it is that the person says they believe.
 - Newton’s 3rd Law of Motion, which says, “For every action there is an equal and opposite reaction.”
 - You see, for scientists, if they can touch something or use physics or mathematics to figure something out, they can then choose to believe in it.
- Simply put, this type of logic says that science and mathematics are proven facts, and therefore, you can trust them. Everything else is just *hoping* and wishing and guessing with no hard proof to back it up!
 - And of course, front and center of this debate is Scripture because believing in Scripture requires faith, and by definition, faith cannot be touched or held or calculated using some mathematical equation.

Hebrews 11:1 Now faith is the assurance of *things* hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.

Hebrews 11:2 For by it the men of old gained approval.

- Another way to say it is: “Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.”
 - Faith requires believing in something that cannot necessarily be proven or held or touched.
 - Now, before we blow right by this text, let’s look at verses 1&2 one more time.

Hebrews 11:1 Now faith is the assurance of *things* hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.

Hebrews 11:2 For by it the men of old gained approval.

- There are two things I want you to see in these verses.
 - First, yes, faith is the assurance of things hoped for, but the Scripture also says it is

the conviction of things not seen.

- Meaning, even though you may not know if something is 100 % true simply because you cannot touch it or do a mathematical equation to prove it, the fact that you are convicted about it (a conviction by the way, is administered by the Holy Spirit) that conviction provides empirical & hard data.
 - And therefore, you can trust it to be true!
- But there is something else I want you to notice about these verses before we press on, and it shows up in verse 2 when it says, “For by it the men of old gained approval. So, what does that mean?”
 - Well, first, who are these “Old Men?”
 - They are those who are referenced in the rest of Hebrews 11 as this section of scripture is often referred to as the “Hall of Faith”
 - Men like Abraham, Moses, Enoch, Noah, Issac, Jacob, and even Sarah. Yes, Sarah is on this list even though she is not a man, and to clear up any confusion surrounding these verses, when you read verse 2 in the Greek, it doesn’t say “Men of Old”.
 - It says: “In this for were commended the ancients”
 - The translators simply translated the verses into “Men of Old”
 - But obviously, it’s not just referring to men, as it clearly mentions women as well.
 - The use of the word men can also mean humanity, as in mankind, so don’t get too upset about the translation issue.
- Anyways, faith by definition, is opposite to something empirical (hard and or touchable). Which means it’s certainly the opposite of science and or mathematics.
 - Faith is different. It is supernatural. It’s “Spiritual” and it’s that thing that gives people the ability to believe in something they cannot see, hear, or touch!
 - Both Ephesians and Romans testify to this very thing.

Ephesians 2:8 For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this *is* not of yourselves, *it is* the gift of God;

Ephesians 2:9 not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

Ephesians 2:10 For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.

- But here’s the question: Is everyone born with faith, with the innate ability to believe, and if so, or if not, then how do we obtain it?
 - Well, here is the truth: we are not sure, and let me explain what I mean.
 - There are places in the scriptures that lean in both directions concerning the topic of faith. For example:

Romans 3:9 What then? Are we better *than they*? Not at all; for we have already charged that both Jews and Greeks are all under sin;

Romans 3:10 as it is written:

“THERE IS NO RIGHTEOUS PERSON, NOT EVEN ONE;

**Romans 3:11 THERE IS NO ONE WHO UNDERSTANDS,
THERE IS NO ONE WHO SEEKS OUT GOD;**

- These verses have been used as a proof text in an effort to prove that people are not naturally born with faith.
 - But upon further examination of the text itself, and if we stay in context, then it's clear that faith is not the focus of this text.
 - Rather, the focus is on the fact that no one is born righteous.
 - Righteousness is a synonym for perfection.
 - Which is what's required if you want to enter Heaven's gates!
- And so, if that is the case (and I assure you it is), then what is required for a man, woman, or child to become Righteous (Perfect and or Holy)?
 - Belief in Jesus, specifically, His sacrifice for our sins on the Cross of Calvary!
 - That is the only thing that will impute righteousness upon an individual.
- So, I wouldn't agree that Romans 3 would be a good proof text in which to prove or disprove someone being born automatically with faith.
 - But are there any other texts that testify (clarifying for us) that people are either A: born with Faith or B: born without it?
 - The answer is NO
 - Faith is mentioned many times throughout the scripture, and the Bible certainly emphasizes its importance.
 - But scripture never explicitly says humans are born with it or without it!

Romans 12:1 Therefore I urge you, brothers *and sisters*, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, *which is* your spiritual service of worship.

Romans 12:2 And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.

Romans 12:3 For through the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith.

Romans 12:4 For just as we have many parts in one body and all the body's parts do not have the same function,

Romans 12:5 so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually parts of one another.

- In these verses, we are introduced to the concept of a believer being given a measure of faith, but once again, this is not in reference to salvation.
 - We know this to be the case because Paul is clearly writing to believers, not unbelievers.
 - As the letter of Romans was written to the church at Rome, not the Roman Church, but the church at Rome, there's a difference.
 - Hence, why he calls them brothers and sisters!
- We also know these verses have nothing to do with salvation, because the point of the text revolves around pride, haughtiness of them thinking more highly of themselves than they should.
 - The actual point of the text revolves around the concept of every believer being given gifts and how no one gift is greater than any other!
 - And for further confirmation of this, let's read on.

Romans 12:6 However, since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, *each of us is to use them properly*: if prophecy, in proportion to *one's* faith;

Romans 12:7 if service, in the *act of* serving; or the one who teaches, in the *act of* teaching;

Romans 12:8 or the one who exhorts, in the *work of* exhortation; the one who gives, with generosity; the one who is in leadership, with diligence; the one who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.

- Now, let me explain where I fall on this faith thing.
 - I believe that, based on the testimony of scripture, faith manifests itself when something specific happens.
 - Do you wonder what that thing is that causes faith to emerge or not emerge?
 - Well, Romans 10:14-17 gives some insight into this process as well, when it says the following:

Romans 10:14 How then are they to call on Him in whom they have not believed? How are they to believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how are they to hear without a preacher?

Romans 10:15 But how are they to preach unless they are sent? Just as it is written: "HOW BEAUTIFUL ARE THE FEET OF THOSE WHO BRING GOOD NEWS OF GOOD THINGS!"

Romans 10:16 However, they did not all heed the good news; for Isaiah says, "LORD, WHO HAS BELIEVED OUR REPORT?"

Romans 10:17 So faith *comes* from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.

- According to Paul, faith is activated through the hearing of the Word of Christ!
 - So, guess what? God's Word is the catalyst for faith.
 - It's like a two-part epoxy.
 - When God's Word is taught, spoken, and or studied, faith will (not always), but if God is dealing with that individual at that time, it will activate.
 - It may not be that person's time yet, but if it is their time, then God's Word is what activates their faith!
 - It's kind of like faith is lying dormant inside the future believer, and one day, when God is ready, that individual hears the Word of God, and that's when the supernatural occurs!
- Now, why do I say that God's Word will, but will not always activate faith!
 - Because we have many places in the scriptures where someone heard God's Word, they heard Jesus Himself speaking, but walked away in disbelief!
 - That doesn't mean one day they might hear and suddenly have their faith activated, we don't know that for sure,
 - All we know is that God's Word is the catalyst for activating faith!
 - I've gotten a little off track here this morning, but not really, because understanding what I am trying to convey is foundational if you are going to understand the purpose and intent of prayer.
- Now, one more thing relating to the use of logic and faith, as I touched on earlier, there are two types of logic: The World's Logic and Spiritual Logic
 - Romans says that we, in our natural state, do not possess the ability to believe in something we cannot touch or feel unless we have the faith to do so!
 - This is why the theory of Evolution is so attractive to those who do not have the faith to believe in Christ.
 - The Theory of Evolution says that creation evolved over time
 - One thing led to the next, and that seems plausible as scientists and proponents of this theory use their own logic to explain how evolution works.
 - Example – If you want to know how old the Earth is, simply take a trip to the Grand Canyon (head to the bottom of it) and look at the different layers of crustation that supposedly formed over time.
 - Scientists say that as the Earth aged, those layers evolved over time, and therefore, if you want to know the age of the Earth, simply count the layers.
 - The problem is that scientists had to come up with a process that validated the age of each layer of crustation.
 - Same thing when dealing with the age of a tree.
 - When you cut a tree down, you can see the growth rings on top of the stump, and therefore, if you want to know the age of a tree, just count the rings!
 - But there is one problem with this process. Both methods have now been called into question.

- In some of the scientific camps, this process has been refuted and debunked (at least to a point).
- Which means there is no way to know for sure if their dating methods actually work.
 - Matter of fact, many scientists reject some of the dating methods that have been used in the past.
 - Methods like Carbon Dating, which is now believed by many scientists (even those who are atheists), are not 100 % reliable.
- The problem with many of the dating methods is their inability to actually test (Whatever it is a person is trying to test) because we cannot take that substance from its inception and observe it over time.
 - For example, with a rock, there is absolutely no way to know for sure how old it is. Meaning, the only true method would be to take a rock from its inception and follow it from there.
 - The same holds true with rings of a tree; it has been proven that the region a tree grows in matters. Hotter climate –or colder climate, etc.
- Also, a tree's rate of growth changes depending on the type of tree it is, as some trees grow faster than others.
- Regardless of what you believe, what you can know is this: A certain measure of faith is required to believe in anything, including science.
 - We cannot know with 100% certainty that one method is 100% correct over another.
 - And one more thing, it takes a whole lot of faith to believe in evolution. I mean, seriously, what is harder to believe: that Rocks formed from nothing, or that we live in a creation and therefore there must be a Creator!
- But what about Spiritual Logic? Spiritual Logic comes from above, through the Holy Spirit
 - It's the only way for a believer to reconcile and find peace as they live out their lives on this earth.
 - Follow me here for just a moment.
 - For example, when Genesis says that God created the Heavens and the earth in 6 days.
 - If I have peace in God and His Word, then I find no internal conflict with that verse, and therefore I am good with it.
 - I mean, if God is the creator, then obviously the creator can do whatever He pleases, and nothing is beyond His capabilities or reach! Makes sense.
 - So Spiritual Logic comes from above, from God, and you cannot arrive at it any other way!
- So, this morning we talked about a lot. What we haven't done is answer the two questions from scripture, which are:
 - Does prayer change things, or can it change things?
 - Does prayer change God's mind, or does it change the course of things?

- Well, as we close, I want to answer the second question first, and I want to do so by asking a question.
- Is there any place in scripture where God appears to change His mind?
 - The answer is..... YES!
- Turn with me if you will to 2 Kings 20:1-6 and then to Isaiah 38:1-8
 - Beginning with 2 Kings 20:1-7

2 Kings 20:1 In those days Hezekiah became mortally ill. And Isaiah the prophet the son of Amoz came to him and said to him, “Thus says the LORD, ‘Set your house in order, for you shall die and not live.’”

2 Kings 20:2 Then he turned his face to the wall and prayed to the LORD, saying,

2 Kings 20:3 “Remember now, O LORD, I beseech You, how I have walked before You in truth and with a whole heart and have done what is good in Your sight.” And Hezekiah wept bitterly.

2 Kings 20:4 Before Isaiah had gone out of the middle court, the word of the LORD came to him, saying,

2 Kings 20:5 “Return and say to Hezekiah the leader of My people, ‘Thus says the LORD, the God of your father David, “I have heard your prayer, I have seen your tears; behold, I will heal you. On the third day you shall go up to the house of the LORD.

2 Kings 20:6 “I will add fifteen years to your life, and I will deliver you and this city from the hand of the king of Assyria; and I will defend this city for My own sake and for My servant David’s sake.””

2 Kings 20:7 Then Isaiah said, “Take a cake of figs.” And they took and laid *it* on the boil, and he recovered.

- So, after reading 2 Kings 20, it appears God changed His mind, as Hezekiah was a dead man, and He cried out to God. He reminded the Lord of all that he had done. He said in verse 3:

2 Kings 20:3 “Remember now, O LORD, I beseech You, how I have walked before You in truth and with a whole heart and have done what is good in Your sight.” And Hezekiah wept bitterly.

- So, to come to the right conclusion concerning this verse, you must begin by asking yourself a question.
 - First off, did God learn anything new about Hezekiah?
 - In other words, did God forget how Hezekiah lived his life?
 - That he walked in truth with his whole heart?
 - No, of course, not.

- If He did, we are all in trouble because that means we are not serving an all-knowing God.
- Once again, the use of Spiritual Logic is very important here.
- So, God did not learn anything new, as He already knew everything there was to know about King Hezekiah.
 - The second question is, does God always have a purpose and intent behind everything He does?
 - Yes, He does!
 - And we know this from the testimony of the Scriptures.
- God always has intent and purpose behind everything He does, and therefore, if God always operates with purposes and intent, and He knew how Hezekiah lived his life, then why did He appear to change His mind?
 - Well, because He was doing something.
 - We know this is the case because we have already established that foundation from the testimony of Scripture.
- So, He was doing something with Hezekiah, and you can be assured that something had everything to do with God's Glory.
 - So, do you wonder what He was doing with Hezekiah in this moment?
 - I don't know, maybe teaching Him something.
 - Maybe teaching about reliance on God.
 - Maybe teaching Him about God's own Sovereignty.
 - How God is in control of all things.
 - How even death is under His subjection.
 - It could be a myriad of things.
- Whatever it is, one thing is for sure: he saved Hezekiah's life for His purposes and His Glory. Not so that Hezekiah could live 15 more years on this earth.
 - You see, Hezekiah wanted to live for the same reasons we all want to live. We do not understand what waits for us on the other side.
 - Therefore, we worry about death from a totally selfish standpoint. We begin to think about our loved ones, the life we won't get to live, etc.
 - But is that why God extended King Hezekiah's life?
 - So, he could experience more of this wonderful life?
 - Listen closely to what happened one more time

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- Before I break this apart for you, let me establish another fundamental truth of scripture.
 - The Bible tells us in Hebrews 9:27 that it is appointed unto men once to die, and then the judgment.
 - Which means that our death is an established point in time.
 - Which means, Hezekiah was never appointed to die in that moment, even though God spoke to Isaiah the prophet and told him to tell Hezekiah this very thing.
 - So, what gives? Well, the answer lies in verse 6:

2 Kings 20:6 “I will add fifteen years to your life, and I will deliver you and this city from the hand of the king of Assyria; and I will defend this city for My own sake and for My servant David’s sake.””

- The key here lies in the words, “for My own sake.”
 - God did what He did for His own sake, not for Hezekiah’s
 - Was there something in it for the King?
 - Yes, learning and knowledge of who God is, and as I said, how He is Sovereign over all things. Even death.
 - But ultimately, it was all for God’s purposes and intent.
 - But what about other places in scripture where God appears to change His mind?
 - Well, I am going to leave you with some homework this morning.
 - I want you to read Exodus 32:14, Jonah 3:10, and Genesis 6:6-7.
 - I want you to apply this same Spiritual Logic to these verses and see if you can come up with the correct conclusion.

- And we are going to rightly divide them next week!
- Amen Amen