

- Today, we are going to pick back up on the topic of prayer.
 - As I said last week, prayer is essential in the life of the believer, and therefore, it's imperative that we have the correct view regarding this topic.
 - That view must not come from some popular belief system or from someone's opinion, but rather, we must form our view of prayer (and any other topic of scripture) from God's Holy Manuscript.
 - Any other view outside God's Word will simply lead the believer into a place of confusion, bewilderment, and discouragement.
- And let me say this, the whole concept of Prayer is interesting, and it's an essential tenet of God!
 - And it has become a generic go-to move (for lack of better words)
 - Meaning, when we get stressed, desperate, or when things get bad, or even appear to be getting bad, prayer is something we all turn to.
 - What's interesting is that it's not only something the church turns to (as obviously it should), but it's also something the world turns to, which has led to even more confusion surrounding this topic.
 - And why do I say that the world has caused even more confusion surrounding the topic of prayer?
- Because, as I said last week, Biblical prayer has been Americanized. Meaning, prayer was specifically designed for God's children, which means it has nothing to do with the world and everything to do with God Himself!
 - And so much in the same way that God has become cliché in our modern society, so has Prayer!
 - What I mean is that God and prayer have been hijacked (sort to speak). When someone who obviously has no interest in the things of God, when they have something good happen to them, when they:
 - A – Score a touchdown
 - B – Do something that gains them national recognition of some sort.
 - C – When something bad happens to them (many times)
 - The world will recognize God by saying that we don't know what we are going to do, so we are just going to pray and trust God!
 - Even though the people who say this are far away from God.
 - You see, the world loves the Americanized Jesus at times.
 - They love to bring Him out in desperate situations and parade Him around (verbally), giving the appearance that they really love the Lord and that they are, in fact, Christ followers.
 - But nothing could be further from the truth.
- Just to give you an example of what I mean, last week there was a nationally televised music event where two artists were doing a duet together. One of them was a Christian artist, and the other was not.

- And man, did they turn the stage into a modern-day Mega church service!
- Complete with smoke, screens, sound, lights, cameras, a gospel choir, and even a hologram Cross projected into the air.
 - And so, these two artists turned that song (in that moment) into what seemed to be a church service.
 - As a matter of fact, the artist even said, I feel God in this place tonight, you are welcome here Lord (As if God needs permission to be anywhere)
- Regardless, that's neither here nor there; I just thought I'd throw that in there to further prove my point.
- So, these two artists had everyone "*razzed*" up, and to be honest with you, if you didn't know better or were just a typical everyday Americanized Christian (One with little to no background on the God of the Bible), you would think they were having some type of Super Spiritual Moment.
 - And as I watched the performance, and as it continued toward the crescendo of the song, in what appeared to be some kind of super spiritual move of God, someone in the room I was sitting in told me something unsettling about one of the artists.
 - And the thing that they told me robbed any semblance of spirituality in that moment. It went right out the door.
 - It was very disturbing, as I thought to myself, how in the world could you act like you are praising God on one hand, but in fact be living your life in a way that was and is opposite of anything God would approve of!
- Now, you might be sitting here today or listening online and saying to yourself, You don't know where this man is in his walk with God.
 - And I would say, I do know, because God gave all believers a way to know, and I will show you. Matthew 7:15-20 – listen to what Matthew wrote concerning this topic:

Matt. 7:15 "Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves."

Matt. 7:16 "You will know them by their fruits."

- And then in the second half of this same verse, Matthew gives us guidance on how we can know when someone is declaring to (not only to know God) but also declaring themselves to be a prophet of God. How can we (as believers) identify who these people are?
 - One more time in verse 16:

Matt. 7:16 "You will know them by their fruits. Grapes are not gathered from thorn *bushes* nor figs from thistles, are they?"

Matt. 7:17 "So every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit."

Matt. 7:18 "A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit."

Matt. 7:19 “Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.

Matt. 7:20 “So then, you will know them by their fruits.

- Now, before moving forward this morning with our teaching, let me say something concerning these verses.
 - The point of Matthew 7 had nothing to do with a perfected life being lived out for Christ, but it has everything to do with saying one thing and openly and blatantly doing the opposite in their life.
 - And doing so with no apparent appearance of conviction present
 - Guys, it’s the absence of conviction that makes all the difference because, as we know, we are all going to stumble and fall and mess up.
 - But the question is, are you bothered by your sin?
 - Are you convicted about it?
 - Or are you good with it?
 - Anyways, we can get insight into someone’s walk with God when we read Matthew 7, and it all revolves around actions moved by conviction.
 - And let me say something about all of this, honestly, this thing is so simple, and God has dumbed it down for us sheep.
- If you study Matthew 7 more in-depth, God is saying, just look at a tree, and if you don’t know what type of tree it is (by looking at its bark or leaves), then all you have to do is wait until the tree bears fruit.
 - Then you will know exactly what kind of tree it truly is!
 - Remember this: a hawk and a dove don’t light on the same line.
 - Light and darkness don’t inhabit the same place. Good and evil don’t coexist in harmony!
 - Meaning, they don’t live together. It’s either one or the other.
- So, when someone openly engages in something opposite to God, His Character, His Commands, and His Will, but then says, “It doesn’t really matter what we do, regardless of the life we live, we praise you, Lord.”
 - Just know you are looking at the person, Matthew 7 is describing.
 - Just like the world uses God as some sort of sidebar when convenient, the world does the same thing with prayer.
 - And when believers see it, many times (not always) but many times, they assume that the world’s so-called prayer is what prayer looks like.
 - And why?
 - Because of the lack of Biblical training (and not just concerning the topic of prayer BTW)
 - Biblical training (concerning all topics of a scriptural nature)

- You see, when believers engage with the world without knowing it, they do so, not knowing (in that moment) that they are shaping their own paradigm concerning our Lord, as they see the world calling on God as if they know Him.
 - In an Americanized format
 - Americanized meaning: praying to God as if He were a genie in a bottle.
- Moving on, last week I posed two questions concerning prayer. One was, does prayer change things?
 - And I answered that question by saying it differently. Instead of saying Does prayer change things, I said the question is not whether prayers change things, but does effectual prayer change things.
 - The answer is yes.
 - What I mean is that if we pray correctly, which is when we pray in accordance with God's Will and not our own will, that's what an "effectual prayer" looks like.
 - That statement is the testimony put forth in scripture!
 - Just think about the Lord's prayer.
 - "Our father who art in Heaven, hallowed be thy name,
 - Thy kingdom come, thy will be done"
 - You get the point!
- The second question that I posed is, can we (through our prayers) change God's mind?
 - And the answer I gave to that question was absolutely not!
 - And this is not my opinion; this is exactly what the scriptures tell us in places like Numbers 23:19

**Numbers 23:19 "God is not a man, that He should lie,
Nor a son of man, that He should repent;
Has He said, and will He not do it?
Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good?"**

- The word repent here also means comfort, change mind, sorry, repent, changed mind, comforters.
 - In the context of this verse, God used the disobedient prophet's own mouth to confirm to the prophet himself that he could not have his way with God, even though the prophet had continually asked God through prayer for the opportunity to curse Israel.
 - Regardless of his prayer, the answer always came back "no".
 - God's will must be done, and God will not change His mind concerning what is good and necessary. No amount of pleading will lead God to do our will over His own will.
 - Another verse that confirms this statement shows up in:

1 Samuel 15:29 “Also the Glory of Israel will not lie or change His mind; for He is not a man that He should change His mind.”

- So, either God changes His Mind or He does not, and I am going with He does not!
- Let me explain what is going on in this section of scripture.
 - Samuel told King Saul he had forfeited his throne to David, and as you might imagine, Saul is not too happy about this outcome, so he pressed God to change His mind.
 - And in response to Saul’s repeated request, the prophet Samuel informed King Saul that God cannot change His mind.
 - And why can He not change his mind?
 - Because God is not a man!
 - Once again, in Hebrew, the words “change His mind” are actually the word "relent".
 - And upon further examination, coupled with a study of that word, you will find the word “relent” here has the same meaning as the word “relent” in Numbers 23:19.
- And one more thing regarding God that I want you to remember, God is immutable. Meaning, He is unable to change.
 - Which means, God is unchanging in His character, His will, and His purpose.
 - And just as I said last week regarding this point, praise the Lord that we serve an immutable God.
 - I would hate to know that we were serving a God who was ever changing and wavering and flailing about in the wind, changing course, placating to every individual’s request!
 - That would not be a God I would want to serve!
 - Instead, we serve a God of absolutes, of certainty, who is totally in control of all things, even the bad things!
- Also, remember, for God to change His mind, He would only do so if somehow, He obtained or learned some new piece of information that would cause Him to change His Will.
 - And logically speaking (in and of itself), that is simply not possible, as God knows all things, as He is omnipotent.
 - What about the verses that clearly seem to indicate God did change His mind, such as the one we studied last week in 2 Kings 20:1-7, where King Hezekiah spoke to the Lord after the prophet Isaiah told him to set his house in order, because he was about to die.
 - Let’s re-read what happened one more time.
 - The Prophet Jeremiah wrote the following:

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, King Hezekiah, upon hearing the news of his soon-to-be death through the prophet Isaiah, did something, and what was it that he did?
 - One more time, verses 2 & 3 of 2 Kings 20

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.

- The scripture says, after hearing Hezekiah’s prayer, God spoke to the prophet Isaiah and told him to tell the King that He was extending His life by 15 more years.
 - Now, let me say something about this verse, something I did not point out last week, and I want you to notice how King Hezekiah did not actually ask God to change His mind.
 - As a matter of fact, He didn’t ask God for anything!
 - He didn’t say, O Lord, hear my cry, you know I have been faithful and true.
 - Therefore, please let me live.
 - Instead, the scripture simply says Hezekiah prayed (But I must be honest), his prayer doesn’t look anything like any prayer I have ever heard someone pray, especially in desperate times.
- Let me say it differently, it doesn’t look like a prayer that most modern-day Christians would pray, does it?
 - I mean, think about it, if God sent a prophet to speak to you this afternoon, and the prophet said, Tom, Sally, Suzie, put your house in order because you are going to

die.

- Upon hearing this, you decided to ask God to save you, wouldn't you say, God, please heal me. You know I have been faithful, and you know how I have tried hard to walk in your truth.
 - Please spare my life, because I am not ready to go yet!
- Isn't that how we would pray, and isn't that how we have all seen prayer modeled throughout our modern church history?
 - Yes, it is, but that's not what happens here.
 - Hezekiah makes no requests. Instead, he makes a statement. One more time, listen to it 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.

- There it is. There is an example of one type of prayer modeled for us in scripture.
 - No request. No wish list. Just a simple statement
 - (Beseech meaning – Urgently Request)
 - The word bitterly here in Hebrew means: Aloud, mighty, more, much, noble, proud thing.
- Now, what's interesting about these verses is how this text of scripture has been used repeatedly as a proof text, testifying to the fact that God changes His mind. Yet, Hezekiah never makes any request of God in His prayer.
 - Certainly not for God to change His mind about His death
 - As a matter of fact, Hezekiah didn't ask God to do anything.
 - He simply lamented the fact that he was dying.
 - But having said that, it's inferred from the context of the verses that God heard his cry and changed His mind, but we know from the rest of the chapter that God didn't change his mind.
 - Once again, Hezekiah never asked God to do anything. There was no wish list, but rather He extended Hezekiah's life of His own accord.
 - For His own Glory, without request.
 - He did so for His own purposes, and not so that Hezekiah could live out the rest of his life on this earth for his own purposes and pleasure.
 - No, once again, it's all about God, His purposes, and His Glory.
- Now, having said all of this, it is true, it does appear (from the text of scripture) that there was something about to happen to Hezekiah and that God shifted from allowing Hezekiah to die to allowing him to live an additional 15 years.
 - But even still, Hezekiah never asked God to do anything.

- One more thing, does the scripture say anything about the timing of when King Hezekiah was going to die?
 - It doesn't. It simply says that He was mortally ill, and he was going to die!
- What about other places in scripture, where God appears to change His mind?
- Well, last week I gave you some homework (some scriptures) to study concerning this topic, and those scriptures were: Exodus 32:14, Jonah 3:10, and Genesis 6:6-7.
 - I would like to turn to each one of these verses and look at them, and we will begin with Exodus 32:14.
- Let me set the scene for you. God has just delivered the Israelites out of 430 years of slavery, and He did so in miraculous fashion.
 - He saved them, freed them, and at the same time defeated Pharaoh's army.
 - He used Moses to do it, and after Moses led the children of God out of Egypt and into the wilderness (far away from Pharaoh's reach), He told the Israelites to stay put as He and Aaron (Moses' brother) went up on Mount Sinai to speak with the Lord.
 - And while they are gone, the Israelites get restless.
 - They get nervous, fearing God had delivered them from the hands of the Egyptians only to lead them into the wilderness to die.
 - Basically, God through Moses had abandoned them.
 - So, they do what spiritually immature people do all the time, and they take matters into their own hands.
 - They decided to build for themselves another God to worship, and so they built a Golden Calf.
 - As a result, because of their lack of trust, God gets angry with them, and here is what we read in:

Exodus 32:7 Then the LORD spoke to Moses, "Go down at once, for your people, whom you brought up from the land of Egypt, have corrupted *themselves*.

Exodus 32:8 "They have quickly turned aside from the way which I commanded them. They have made for themselves a molten calf, and have worshiped it and have sacrificed to it and said, 'This is your god, O Israel, who brought you up from the land of Egypt!'"

Exodus 32:9 The LORD said to Moses, "I have seen this people, and behold, they are an obstinate people.

Exodus 32:10 "Now then let Me alone, that My anger may burn against them and that I may destroy them; and I will make of you a great nation."

- So, in verses 7-10, we are told what the Israelites did, and we are also told how God felt about the situation.
 - He was very angry, and next, we have Moses' response to God and His anger.

Exodus 32:11 Then Moses pleaded with the LORD his God, and said, “LORD, why does Your anger burn against Your people whom You have brought out from the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand?

Exodus 32:12 Why should the Egyptians talk, saying, ‘With evil *motives* He brought them out, to kill them on the mountains and to destroy them from the face of the earth’? Turn from Your burning anger and relent of *doing* harm to Your people.

Exodus 32:13 Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, Your servants to whom You swore by Yourself, and said to them, ‘I will multiply your descendants as the stars of the heavens, and all this land of which I have spoken I will give to your descendants, and they shall inherit *it* forever.’”

Exodus 32:14 So the LORD relented of the harm which He said He would do to His people.

- In these verses, we are introduced once again to the word relented.
 - And verse 14 clearly says that the Lord relented of the harm which He said He would do to His people.
 - So, based on the word “relented,” it would appear that God changed His mind, right?
 - I mean the word “relent”, that word in and of itself seems to indicate that God was going to do one thing, and now He is not, and so what gives?
- Well, I assure you God did not change His mind, and to understand these verses correctly, you must first understand the difference between a conditional and an unconditional declaration of God.
 - An example of a conditional declaration would be when God said in the book of Jonah, “I will destroy Nineveh in forty days.”
 - He was speaking conditionally, based on the Assyrians’ response to His request for them to repent, and we know this to be the case because the Assyrians repented, and God did not destroy them.
 - Meaning, God didn’t change His mind here; He simply issued a warning, and that warning was meant to invoke repentance, which it did.
 - An example of an unconditional declaration of God would be the Lord’s promise to David.
 - Where there was no qualification expressed or implied in the declaration
 - Which meant that no matter what David did or did not do, the word of the Lord would come to pass, and as we know, it did and always does!
- As we close this morning, I want you to remember something. The things that confuse everyone concerning prayer are that we keep trying to humanize it as if God were us.
 - God is not human.
 - He is the creator of the universe.
 - He is immutable. He never changes.

- And this is fleshed out in Isaiah when the prophet says the following:

Isaiah 55:8 “For My thoughts are not your thoughts,
Nor are your ways My ways,” declares the LORD.

Isaiah 55:9 “For *as* the heavens are higher than the earth,
So are My ways higher than your ways
And My thoughts than your thoughts.

Isaiah 55:10 “For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven,
And do not return there without watering the earth
And making it produce and sprout,

And providing seed to the sower and bread to the eater;
Isaiah 55:11 So will My word be which goes out of My mouth;
It will not return to Me empty,
Without accomplishing what I desire,
And without succeeding *in the purpose* for which I sent it.

- If we quit trying to humanize God, we will not struggle with understanding prayer.
 - The problem is that when we go to the Lord in prayer, we do so as if He is on the same plane as we are.
 - Meaning, we do so as if He and I are on the same level.
 - Having the same thought process as if God and I have the same goals.
 - And the truth is, we don’t because we are not omnipotent (all knowing)
 - When we do this, all we really do is set ourselves up for disappointment.
 - God is doing something inside His Creation.
 - Did you notice I said His Creation, not our Creation, but His!
 - We do not know what He is doing, and therefore, all we can do is pray in this manner.
 - Lord, here is my prayer. My request is this, but Your will be done, not mine!
 - And honestly, there may be no better scripture to testify to this fact than that of Proverbs 16:9, which says:

Proverbs 16:9 “The mind of man plans his way, but the Lord directs his steps”

- Our confusion surrounding prayer comes from our presuppositions concerning God.
 - Meaning that when we try to understand God, we do so from a worldly perspective by humanizing Him!
 - As if He is one of us, which He is not.
- If we want to emerge from all the confusion, then we must erase the erroneous perception we have of God in our minds and replace it with the reality of who He truly is

based on the testimony of scripture!

- And if we do that, we will never struggle with the purpose and intent of prayer or any other topic of scripture!
- Next week, we are going to continue our journey on this topic as we dig deeper into some of the other categories of prayer, and eventually (after doing more of a deep dive), we are going to address the intent behind this all-important tenet of God.
 - And one more time, I want to give you some homework, but this time I also want to engage you in a critical thinking exercise.
 - The homework revolves around negotiations with God, and it shows up in Genesis 18:16-33.
 - You may remember the scene where God informs Abraham, He is going to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah, and Abraham begins negotiating with God, trying to change His mind.
 - Primarily because Abraham's nephew Lot and His family lived in that city!
 - I want you to study that section of scripture, and we are going to talk about it next week.
 - Also, I want to do a little critical thinking exercise with you, and you can do that by asking yourself a simple yet profound question.
- If prayer wasn't a thing and God didn't command it, what would your Christian life and walk look like?
 - Meaning, what would you do in times of stress, conflict, sickness, pain, depression, worry, and confusion!
 - How would we commune with God?
 - What would it be like if we couldn't petition the Lord in prayer?
- I want you to think about what that might look like, and next week we will talk about that as well, as we continue our study on the topic of prayer!
 - AMEN – AMEN