

Study 5. Prayer: Exercising His Authority

Growing Faith Series

Is Everything That Happens God's Will?

During the eight-year war between Iran and Iraq in the 1980s, the leaders of Iran sent thousands of their children, some as young as twelve years old, to their deaths as suicide squads. Following is an excerpt from an article written by Matthias Kuntzel:

During the Iran-Iraq War, Ayatollah Khomeini of Iran imported 500,000 small plastic keys from Taiwan. The trinkets were meant to be inspirational. After Iraq invaded in September 1980, it quickly became apparent that Iran's forces were no match for Saddam Hussein's professional, well-armed military. To compensate for their disadvantage, Khomeini sent Iranian children to the front lines of the battle, some as young as twelve years old. There, they marched in formation across minefields toward the enemy, clearing a path with their bodies. Before every mission, they hung the keys around each child's neck. It was supposed to open the gates to paradise for them.¹

These children who ran to their deaths were part of the Basiji, a mass volunteer movement created by Khomeini in 1979 and militarized after the war started to supplement his beleaguered army. They went enthusiastically, and by the thousands, to their destruction. “The young men cleared the mines with their bodies,” one veteran of the Iran-Iraq War recalled in 2002 to the German newspaper *Frankfurter Allgemeine*. “It was sometimes like a race. Even without the commander's orders, everyone wanted to be first.” When asked why they sacrificed their young in such a way, the Iranian response was that it was Allah's will if they died.

Although it seems apparent to us that sending children to clear the minefields by using their bodies to blow up mines is an appalling and evil concept, the men who trained children for this purpose justified it by believing that the children were sent to heaven. They thought that whatever happens is Allah's will, and they should give their lives in this way.

In the 1950s, Doris Day sang a favorite song called *Que Sera Sera* (Whatever will be will be). Are all things that happen God's will?

Some people think that since God knows everything that will happen and allows it to take place, everything that happens is God's will. “*Whatever will be, will be, the future's not ours to see, Que Sera Sera.*” If that is true, then why should we pray? Can prayer change things? Over the last few weeks, we have been learning that God has given authority over the earth to humankind and that God has chosen to work through humankind. We learned that Satan gained the upper hand over man by Adam's sin of disobedience to God's command and that the race of man lives under the authority of Satan, whom Jesus called *the prince of this world* in two different places (John 14:30 and 16:11). In another Scripture, Paul the apostle wrote that this world is under the dominion of Satan. He called him “*the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient*” (Ephesians 2:2). We also learned that Jesus came to share

¹ <http://www.matthiaskuntzel.de/contents/ahmadinejads-demons>.

our “humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil—and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death” (Hebrews 2:14-15). The Lord Jesus has now won back Satan's authority gained from Adam on the cross. Before His ascension to heaven, Jesus said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit...” (Matthew 28:18-19).

If the book of Hebrews (2:14) is correct in saying that Satan has been destroyed through the cross, how come he’s still able to affect our lives through temptation?

God has given authority to the Church to wield His power and overcome all the ground that the enemy still has under his dominion. We are to rescue those precious and invaluable to Him, those who cannot yet see what Christ has done for them. The enemy of their souls prevents them from seeing the gospel:

by setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God. ³And even if our gospel is veiled, *it is veiled to those who are perishing.* ⁴The *god of this age has blinded the minds* of unbelievers, so that *they cannot see* the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God (2 Corinthians 4:2-4 Emphasis mine).

Satan sows thought seeds into people’s minds; he suggests thoughts of ridicule and rejection and promotes feelings and doubts to cause someone not to hear or accept the gospel's message. Satan aims to steal, kill and destroy. We, the Church of the Living God (the word Church means “called out ones”), are called to enforce the legislation that is now against our enemy because of what happened at the cross, that he should release his captives to the will of God. God has given us the authority to compel Satan through prayer and faith in God to yield ground to the church.

The Need of the Hour—Those Who Will Pray

John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist church, once said, “God does nothing on the earth except in answer to believing prayer.”

How much importance do you attach to John Wesley’s statement? If you think it is a true statement, why would God deliberately limit himself to only working through prayer? If you believe that it is not a correct statement, please give your reasons why.

John Wesley bases his belief on several important scriptures that indicate that God chooses to work on earth only in response to prayer. It is an exciting concept to consider. If this is true, it should certainly lead us to more intense prayer. Why would God choose to limit Himself in this way and only act in partnership with men and women on earth? Let’s look at two or three passages from the Bible:

²⁹The people of the land practice extortion and commit robbery; they oppress the poor and needy and mistreat the alien, denying them justice. ³⁰**I looked for a man among them who would build up the wall and stand before me in the gap** on behalf of the land **so I**

would not have to destroy it, but I found none. ³¹So I will pour out my wrath on them and consume them with my fiery anger, bringing down on their own heads all they have done, declares the Sovereign LORD" (Ezekiel 22:29-31).

What are we to understand from this passage?

At that time in Israel's history, before the Babylonian captivity, God was angry with His people because the poor, the needy, and those living in the land from other countries were being denied justice and robbed by the Israelites. God said that He looked for an intercessor, a man who would build up the gap in the wall. What is meant by the gap in the wall? The word picture is of a walled city where the outside wall, the defensive line, has been broken and is open and bare before an enemy who would pour through the gap to destroy the city. It speaks of the difference between how things should be and how they are. God needed a man or woman of prayer to stand in the gap and build up the wall so that the Lord would not have to destroy and pour out His wrath on them. Their sin as a nation warranted disciplinary action by God. His longing was to give mercy to the land inhabitants in answer to prayer, but there was no intercessor, no man or woman of prayer that would cry out for mercy for Israel. The passage concludes that God is forced to consume them with His fiery anger and give them the consequences of their actions.

What do you think would have happened if God had found an intercessor to stand in the gap?

Here again, we see that God chooses to work in partnership with men through prayer. Even when He has determined to accomplish something, He searches for one who will pray and stand in the gap. Let's look at another passage where God's need is for an intercessor to bring about something He has said He would do. In 1 Kings 17, the prophet Elijah is directed to tell Ahab, the King of Israel, that **"there will be neither dew nor rain in the next few years except at my word (1 Kings 17:1)**. For three and a half years, not a drop of rain fell on Israel, just as the prophet foretold. In the 18th chapter, God tells Elijah, **"Go and present yourself to Ahab, and I will send rain on the land" (1 Kings 18:1)**. The Scriptures then tell of a challenge between the God of Elijah, the LORD, and the false prophets of Baal. The God who answered by fire is the real God. After a spectacular showing of God's power with fire coming down from heaven at Elijah's prayer, as well as the repentance of His people Israel, it is time for the rain to come according to the word of God. Elijah is then led to the top of Mount Carmel and has to pray for the Lord to answer and the rain to come:

⁴¹And Elijah said to Ahab, "Go, eat and drink, for there is the sound of a heavy rain." ⁴²So Ahab went off to eat and drink, but Elijah climbed to the top of Carmel, bent down to the ground and put his face between his knees. ⁴³"Go and look toward the sea," he told his servant. And he went up and looked. "There is nothing there," he said. Seven times Elijah said, "Go back." ⁴⁴The seventh time the servant reported, "A cloud as small as a man's hand is rising from the sea." So Elijah said, "Go and tell Ahab, 'Hitch up your chariot and go down before the rain stops you.'" ⁴⁵Meanwhile, the sky grew black with clouds, the wind rose, a heavy rain came on, and Ahab rode off to Jezreel (1 Kings 18:41-45).

Elijah bent down to the ground with his face between his knees; some say this is a typical posture of birthing a baby in the Middle East. It is also an ideal posture for prayer and intercession. King Ahab had been fasting, so Elijah tells him to eat, drink, and get ready for the rain that Elijah would bring to birth by prayer. He knew that if he prayed, God would send the rain (Zechariah 10:1). Why should Elijah pray for something that God had already told him would happen? The Lord had already said that He would bring rain on the land but still directed Elijah to pray until he saw evidence of the coming rain.

What would have happened if Elijah didn't obey? Why did he send his servant to check if there was a cloud yet? Why didn't he go himself?

Elijah didn't get his answer without a trial of faith. It would have been easy to give up praying when his servant came back the third time, saying that there was no cloud. At the seventh time he sent his servant, a little cloud appeared in the sky. His work done, he got off his knees and went down from the top of Mount Carmel. The man of God prayed until he received the answer God gave him earlier, that He would send rain. The rain had to be birthed into the physical realm by prayer. God needed a man to stand in the gap.

A similar thought is found in the Book of Daniel. The nation of Israel was disciplined and deported by God using the hand of King Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, who enslaved them for seventy years. God could stomach their idol worship as well as many other sins of disobedience no longer. Their punishment was not without hope, though. The Lord used the prophet Jeremiah to tell them: "When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfill my gracious promise to bring you back to this place" (Jeremiah 29:10). There in Babylon, the prophet Daniel read a scroll of the words of the prophet, but instead of waiting for it to happen, the prophet began to stand in the gap and pray the words into being:

"I, Daniel, understood from the scriptures, according to the word of the LORD given to Jeremiah the prophet, that the desolation of Jerusalem would last seventy years. So I turned to the LORD God and pleaded with him in prayer and petition, in fasting, and in sackcloth and ashes" (Daniel 9:2-3).

When Daniel realized that the seventy-year time of desolation was nearing the end, he began to plead for God to fulfill His word. Again, we see that God chose the people of God to partner with Him in prayer to bring His will into being.

Share a time when you felt an urgent need to pray for someone else. What happened? (You can pass on this question if you do not want to answer.)

God is looking to His church, those given the authority of Christ to pray God's will into being. He is using this time to train us. If we do not pray, God will not act. The problem is not on God's end; it is on our end. James, the half-brother of the Lord Jesus, states in his letter, "**You do not have, because you do not ask God.** When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures" (James 4:2-3). If the Church does not pray, God will not act. The Lord has determined that He will only operate in this world through the prayers of His people.

E. M. Bounds, the great writer on the topic of prayer, wrote:

God shapes the world by prayer. The more praying there is in the world, the better the world will be, the mightier the forces against evil. The prayers of God's saints are the capital stock of heaven by which God carries on His great work upon earth. God conditions the very life and prosperity of His cause on prayer.²

When we get a hold of this truth, that God has limited Himself to only work through His people, we will begin to look at our world differently and change our lives to be the heavenly police force. We will start to take the authority that God has given us over all the power of the enemy. Jesus said that this authority is ours because of what He did at the cross: **“I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you (Luke 10:19).** The snakes and scorpions mentioned in the passage are symbolic of demonic evil spirits that we have been given power and authority over—if we will exercise that authority. The enemy’s only weapon that he can muster against us is his weapon of unbelief. He will oppose prayer more than anything else you can do. He begins to lose when we, the church, take up the weapons Christ has given us, namely that of prayer; Satan’s kingdom is plundered of the precious people in bondage to sin and the devil. God’s work is carried on in the world by prayer. Jesus put it like this:

He told them, "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field (Luke 10:2).

It was God's will for more workers to be reaching out, so why was Jesus asking for His people to pray for more?

In the passage above, the world is seen as a harvest field, with the ripened sheaves of wheat representing non-Christians around us ready to respond to the gospel if only someone goes to work in the field of their hearts. In preceding verses, the Master had already sent out 72 workers into the harvest fields of the towns and villages of Israel. His heart for His people and His lost ones was not satisfied with 72 workers reaching out. His passion is that we should cry out to the Father in prayer for more workers. I am making the point that we all know that it is not God's will that any should perish, but everyone to come to repentance (2 Peter 3:9), so why should the church have to pray for something that we know is God's will? The truth is that God does nothing on earth without a man or woman of God exercising the authority that God gave His representatives.

Here below are a few quotes from great men of God who knew a few things about prayer:

Give me one hundred preachers who fear nothing but sin and desire nothing but God, and I care not a straw whether they be clergymen or laymen; such alone will shake the gates of hell and set up the kingdom of heaven on earth. God does nothing but in answer to prayer. John Wesley

²Destined For The Throne, Paul Billheimer, Bethany House Publishers, Page 51.

Prayer is not overcoming God's reluctance but laying hold of His willingness. Martin Luther

Beware in your prayers, above everything else, of limiting God, not only by unbelief but by fancying that you know what He can do. Expect unexpected things 'above all that we ask or think.' Andrew Murray

Whether we like it or not, asking is the rule of the Kingdom. 'Ask, and ye shall receive.' It is a rule that never will be altered in anybody's case. Our Lord Jesus Christ is the elder brother of the family, but God has not relaxed the rule for Him. Remember this text: Jehovah says to his Son, 'Ask of me, and I shall give Thee the heathen for Thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for Thy possession.' If the Royal and Divine Son of God cannot be exempted from the rule of asking that He may have, you and I cannot expect the rule to be relaxed in our favor. Why should it be? What reason can be pleaded why we should be exempted from prayer? What argument can there be why we should be deprived of the privilege and delivered from the necessity of supplication? I can see none, can you? God will bless Elijah and send rain on Israel, but Elijah must pray for it. If the chosen nation is to prosper, Samuel must plead for it. If the Jews are to be delivered, Daniel must intercede. God will bless Paul, and the nations shall be converted through him, but Paul must pray. Pray he did without ceasing; his epistles show that he expected nothing except by asking for it. If you may have everything by asking, and nothing without asking, I beg you to see how absolutely vital prayer is, and I beseech you to abound in it.³ Charles Spurgeon.

The story is told of a Jewish Rabbi in a Russian city; he was so discouraged with his faith and calling and doubting if God had indeed spoken to him to be in the ministry. While he was deep in thought and wandering through the chilly night, he inadvertently strolled into a Russian compound off-limits to civilians. All of a sudden, there was the loud yell of a soldier shouting, "Hey! Who are you, and what are you doing here?" The Rabbi, being caught unaware, responded, "Excuse me?" Again, the Russian soldier said, "I said, who are you, and what are you doing here?" Trying not to bring any alarm to the situation, the Rabbi said, "How much do they pay you every day?" The Russian soldier responded by saying, "What in the world does that have to do with you being in this restricted area?" The Rabbi replied, "I would be willing to pay you the same sum if you would ask me the same two questions every morning, who are you, and what are you doing here?"

Our God longs to arrest us with the same question. Who are you, and what are you doing here? First, we must get the truth of who we are in Christ deep in our spirit. We must know that we are a son or daughter of the Living God, that we are not our own, that we have been bought with a price. Then we must know what we are doing here. What is your purpose? Have you found out what you are supposed to be doing here? I feel sure that when we grasp the truth of these words concerning prayer, the fruit of our meditations will be a continuous and growing faith in God.

³ E.M. Bounds, The Classic Collection on Prayer, Published by Bridge-Logos, Gainesville, Fl. Page 521.

Prayer: Father, please help me be sensitive to pray first and not last when I see the needs of Your kingdom. I know that You desire to give, so teach me to ask. Help me to pray and exercise the authority that you have given me. Amen!

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