



Sunday, September 22nd
Part 2: "Let's Pray... Righteously"
Proverbs 15:29; Isaiah 1

Two weeks ago we kicked off our new ministry year. And God has laid it on our hearts to seek Him for revival this entire ministry year as we ramp up toward our 25-year anniversary next August.

A revived church is the only kind of church that's going to be used by God to accomplish His mission that every people, nation, tribe and tongue possess the gospel.

This mission is THE mandate Christ gave the church after His resurrection before He ascended back to heaven. It's been the mandate of His church now for 2,000 years.

And this morning, right now, Sunday, September 22nd, 2019, at this point in history, WE are the ones Christ is calling and depending on to carry forth the torch of the gospel to the nations and make disciples of all peoples right here in Norwalk and around the world.

And that's where prayer comes in. God moves in revival among His people at His discretion and in His perfect timing. There is nothing we can do to coerce God to move in revival. But we can place ourselves in a position to experience revival if and when He moves.

The historical record of the Bible, as well as church history proves that whenever God moves, there is always a foundation of prayer that existed prior to that moving.

So we can't make God revive us, but we can get serious about seeking Him in prayer for revival. And so that's why we're focusing on Transforming Prayer these first 5 weeks of this new ministry year.

Last Sunday we identified from the Scriptures the fact that prayer is a relationship with God. That's what it's all about. Prayer is our expression of dependence on God.

And prayer is something that's meant to be continuous or constant.

(Slide) 1 Thess. 5:17 – PURPLE WRIST BAND (FREE in Café/G. Central).

So as we move forward in our prayer study, each week we're going to build our understanding of prayer as it relates to revival. Last Sunday I simply exhorted you in-regards-to prayer with these 2 words, "Let's Pray".

This morning let me add this dimension to prayer...

Let's Pray... Righteously

"If there is no revival of righteousness, there is no revival at all."

~ Arthur Wallis (Author/Bible teacher)

“No king or president or prime ministry has as much influence on earth as a righteous person who has God’s ear.”

~ Pastor Henry Blackaby

Let me first give definition to what I mean by praying righteously then I’ll build the case from the Scriptures why praying righteously is necessary for revival.

One of our generation’s greatest authorities on revival and prayer is Pastor Henry Blackaby. Pastor Blackaby is in his mid-80’s now, but I’ve learned so much from him through the years about the Bible says about revival and prayer.

From his study of the Scriptures He suggests that...

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Righteous praying is praying in total agreement with God’s heart, prizing what He values, despising what He hates, is devoid of any selfish or sinful motive, flows from a heart of complete surrender to God and above all else values God being glorified and His will being carried out on earth exactly as it is in heaven.

With that as a foundation let’s see what the Scriptures have to say. There’s a little verse tucked in the middle of the book of Proverbs that jumped off the pages of Scripture as I began this study that I want to show you.

I began to see its truth pop up in other passages as well – like a chain reaction – until it became very obvious to me that not only is this truth not an isolated one, but its pervasion throughout the Scriptures.

In fact, this truth - that prayer must be accompanied with righteousness – is critical to our understanding of both prayer and revival. Let me show you this verse – it’s also our memory verse for this week, so let’s say it together out loud...

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“The Lord is far from the wicked, but He hears the prayer of the righteous.”

Proverbs 15:29

The truth of this verse is, as my dad used to say, is plain as the nose on your face. Let me give you my personal paraphrase of it in 2 parts.

First, the first part of the verse is saying that God doesn’t hang out with people who choose to habitually live in sin. In fact, He’s so far away from them that no matter how much they talk to Him, He doesn’t listen to them.

Let me show you another example of this truth from God’s dealings with His people, look at Isaiah. READ Isaiah 1:1-15.

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“When you lift up your hands in prayer, I will refuse to look at you; even if you offer countless prayers, I will not listen. Your hands are covered with blood.” ~ God – to His people Judah

Isaiah 1:15

God's people were going through the motions of religion but at the same time they were living wickedly. And God was sick of it. Their sinful living cancelled out their acts of religion. So God through His hands up in the air and said to them very plainly...

“If this is the way you want things to be, know this: you can pray all you want to, but I'm not going to listen. As long as your lives are marked by wickedness you can forget turning to me for help.”

And this is a principle that remains true today. A person can be as “religious” as they want, but religious actions mean nothing to God if our lives are also characterized by sinful living.

Religious actions are cancelled out by sinful living – to the extent that God refuses to hear a person's prayers no matter how much they may beg Him for their help. If you understand this truth, say, “Amen”.

Now here's my paraphrase for the second half of Proverbs 15:29... But God gets close to those who choose to live a lifestyle of righteousness. So close that He hears every whisper they speak to Him in prayer.

So let me put these two halves together so that you get the emphasis of the entire verse:

(Slide)

God doesn't hang out with people who choose to habitually live in sin. In fact, He's so far away from them that no matter how much they talk to Him, He doesn't listen to them. But God gets close to those who choose to live a

lifestyle of righteousness. So close that He hears every whisper they speak to Him in prayer.

Let me show you another example of the message of Proverbs 15:29, just a few verses back in the same chapter...

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“The sacrifice of the wicked is detestable to the Lord, but the prayer of the upright is His delight.”

Proverbs 15:8

Again, God emphasizes that religious actions accompanied by sinful living is something so heinous to Him He calls it detestable. But when a person lives the way God wants them to live, doing what is right, He delights in hearing their prayer.

In this verse the descriptor “upright” is used. It’s another word for righteous. To live upright means to live straight in accordance with God’s Word and His ways.

We are assured by God that He will listen and respond to our prayers when we seek to follow Him first with our character AND THEN with our words. With a righteous life AND THEN our prayers.

The thread of this truth runs through the Psalms as well...

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“The eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and His ears are open to their cry for help. The face of the Lord is set against those who do what is evil...The righteous cry out, and the Lord hears, and delivers them from all their troubles. The Lord is near the brokenhearted; He saves those crushed in spirit.”

Psalm 34:15-18

The Apostle Peter quoted these verses in His first epistle so the thread of this truth runs into the New Testament as well...

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“For the one who wants to love life and to see good days must keep his tongue from evil, and his lips from speaking deceit, and he must turn away from evil and do what is good. He must seek peace and pursue it, because the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and His ears are open to their request. But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.”

1 Peter 3:10-12

Peter gives it to us straight, what righteousness looks like and the kind of person whose prayers are heard by God. He shows us what a righteous person looks like. Right these down on your notes...

A righteous person is one who...

1. Keeps his tongue from evil
2. Keeps his lips from deceit
3. Refuses to do evil by turning away from it
4. Seeks to do what is good

5. Seeks to live a life of peace with others

And I underlined that phrase that directly deals with prayer in the verse...when we live the way God wants us to live, His ears are open to us when we pray. But when we live in direct violation to God's ways, we haven't got a prayer.

Hold your place in Isaiah because we're not done there yet and turn over to Psalm 15. So maybe you're thinking, "Give me some more examples as to what God is looking for in righteous living."

Here in this Psalm David outlines for us what righteous living looks like in practice. Overall, this chapter describes the ethics and the integrity God is looking for in us. READ Psalm 15

Let's add these to the list on our notes from 1 Peter. If you want God to hear and answer your prayers, here's what God expects and what He is looking for in us...

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A righteous person is one who...

6. One who lives a lifestyle of high integrity (is honest in all dealings)
7. One whose deeds exhibit justice and rightness
8. One whose speech is reliable and true
9. One who does not tread over people with their tongue
10. One who does not harm other people
11. One who does not heap reproach on family or friend (blaming others)

12. One who views sinners as rejected from God and in need of Him
13. One who respects God's people
14. One who holds themselves accountable and keep their word no matter what
15. One who does not seek to take advantage of others financially
16. One who is not greedy
17. One who will not accept a bribe – they cannot be bought

These character qualities mark the righteous and they're honored by God to the extent that He desires to honor their prayers as a result.

So after considering these verses about prayer and the importance of how we live – whether we live righteously or unrighteously and how our lifestyle impacts our prayers, lets me give you several principles that we can take home with us and apply to our lives...

Prayer Principles:

(Slide) 1. Our righteous standing with God is a work of God in us that begins at salvation. None of our prayers are heard by God before this takes place – John 9:31; Romans 5:1.

“We know that God doesn't listen to sinners, but if anyone is God-fearing and does His will, He listens to him.”

John 9:31

“Therefore, since we have been declared righteous by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Romans 5:1

(Slide) 2. Our righteous standing with God, begun at salvation, while permanent, must be maintained in practice by us as we live in obedience to Him and His Word, and results in our prayers being powerful with God – James 5:16.

“...the intense prayer of the righteous is very powerful.”

James 5:16b

“The Lord is near all who call out to Him, all who call out to Him with integrity. He fulfills the desires of those who fear Him; He hears their cry for help and saves them.”

Psalm 145:18-19

(Slide) 3. When we pray according to God’s will, God always hears our prayers, and He always responds – Matt. 7:7-8; 1 John 5:14-15.

“Keep asking, and it will be given to you. Keep searching and you will find. Keep knocking, and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who searches find, and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.”

Matthew 7:7-8

“Now this is the confidence we have before Him: Whenever we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears whatever we ask, we know that we have what we have asked Him for.”

1 John 5:14-15

(Slide) 4. Unchecked and unconfessed sin will make our prayers ineffective – Psalm 66:18; 1 Peter 3:7, 12; Proverbs 28:9.

Righteousness in prayer means to be right with God, with no sin blocking our prayers from being received by God.

“If I would have cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened.”

Psalm 66:18

“Anyone who turns his ear away from hearing the law – even his prayer is detestable.”

Proverbs 28:9

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“Because the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and His ears are open to their request. But the face of the Lord is against those who do what is evil.”

1 Peter 3:12

“Husbands, in the same way, live with your wives with an understanding of their weaker nature yet showing them honor as coheirs of the grace of life, so that your prayers will not be hindered.”

1 Peter 3:7

(Slide) 5. Praying righteously is possible only after we have allowed the Holy Spirit to thoroughly cleanse us from sin – Psalm 139:23-24; Isaiah 1:16-18

READ Isaiah 1:16-18

“Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my concerns. See if there is any offensive way in me; lead me in the everlasting way.”

Psalm 139:23-24

In a moment, I’m going to give us all an opportunity to do this as we prepare our hearts for communion.

Fellowship, if you want God to hear your prayers – if WE want God to hear OUR prayers for revival here in our church family – we have to back those prayers up with righteous living, not hypocritical living. We have to live God’s way, not our way.

We have to pray in total agreement with God’s heart of righteousness. We have to value what He values in our ethics, how we relate to others, how we do business.

We have to possess a heart of surrender to God and desire that He be glorified in our lives, in this church and in our community so that His will is done on earth as it is in heaven. Fellowship: Let’s not just pray, let’s Pray Righteously!!!