

I was coming up from New Salem this past Sunday, thinking about the needs of this congregation and the needs of this part of the world. I think you all remember how hot it was on Sunday and that made me think of one of our most pressing needs at that time, which was our need for rain. We were in desperate need of it. And so I decided on the way up to New Salem that this was a good time that we should approach the Lord in prayer and ask him for all of this rich blessing. And when I got up here to Hannover, I talked to some of the elders of the church and we decided to hold the service today, because this seemed to be the best day to do all of this. And so having made that decision, we went on with our Sunday morning. And during the prayer of the church, if you remember, we prayed for rain. We asked God that he would give us rain so that we might have a good harvest. And I always know that that's on your mind and on my mind too, because whenever we pray for rain in church, it seems like everybody says "hear our prayer" just a little bit louder, so I know that this is something that's been weighing on our minds. But the service being done, I talked to some of my friends and decided that I was going to preach on James here, because this is one of the best passages we have in the New Testament for talking about the power of prayer. And so I set about in prayer and study to prepare for today.

But God gave us a tremendous lesson this past week in the power of prayer, didn't he? Because if you remember, the same Sunday, just this last Sunday, at least here in Hannover--I know wasn't in every part of the county, but at least here in Hannover--we had a very intense but very brief shower storm. Even brought with it some hail as if there was so much desire to give us rain and moisture that it needed to come down just a little bit faster too. And then on Monday we had a brief shower. But yesterday, above all, at least here in Hannover again, it rained nearly all day. We got nearly 2 inches from what I'm told. I know that changes in different parts of this county, but 2 inches or more in the course of these past three days. And Christians, don't think that this was coincidence. Don't think that this was just some mere happenstance, that we just happened to get lucky. God has answered prayer, because, as James tells us in our passage for this evening, "the prayer of a righteous person has great power while it is working." There is power in prayer. There is something glorious in prayer. Because when we come before God in prayer, we are presenting our petitions to a God who is powerful. A God who can do all things.

Because there's a real tendency, I think, even among well-meaning Christians, to treat prayer as almost powerless. I don't think we intend to do it. I think it just sort of happens. Prayer is something that we do before meals. Prayer is something that we do in church. Prayer is something that maybe we do before bed. It's just kind of habit. And because it becomes habit--and it's a good habit, don't get me wrong--but because it becomes habit, it almost becomes just doing something. We forget something of the power of prayer. You know, like when someone hears about someone who struggling, for example, and we say I'm sending you my thoughts and prayers. Obviously, we mean that in the best way. We mean that with the best of intentions. But prayer is not just a good thought about someone. Prayer is a mighty, living, powerful thing. Prayer changes things. And we have seen that this week in the prayer that has been answered. God's answering our prayer for rain in this powerful, even somewhat miraculous way. God is powerful, Christians, and we should not forget that.

James even shows us something of the power of prayer in the example of Elijah. Elijah, he says, was a man with a nature just like ours. He wasn't an angel. He's not superhuman. He's not God. He's just a man. And yet Elijah could pray and do amazing things through prayer, because he trusted in God who answers prayer. Because consider the situation that he was facing. Elijah was one of the few faithful people in his time. King Ahab was completely godless, and his wife Jezebel was bringing all kinds of false worship into Israel, leading all kinds of people astray. And so Elijah wanted to call them back to God, to call them to return to the living God and to turn away from their false idols. And so what did

Elijah do? He prayed that it would not rain, and it didn't for three and a half years. And it was a call to Israel and a call to Ahab and Jezebel to turn away from their sins and to turn back to the living God. And then at the end of all of it, Elijah prayed again, and as soon as his prayer was uttered, it rained, after that long three and a half year drought, because prayer changes things, Christians. Prayer is powerful. We should not forget that in the midst of all of this.

So the question should be asked. When, then, should we pray? Well James answers that question too. He says, "Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray." In the book of James, this suffering is not just spiritual suffering. It's physical suffering too, the kind of suffering that we were experiencing, the dryness of the land and the uncertainty of what our future this year might hold. But James tells us, in the midst of that situation, pray to the God who is powerful, because he hears our cries. He answers our prayers. He is the one who moves mountains, and when we trust in him and pray to him, we move mountains too through him.

"Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praise." Prayer is not just for the tough times. That's another temptation we have, to only pray when we need something. But this is why we're here tonight, Christians, to give thanks, to give thanks to the Lord who has answered our prayers. In the times of joy, in the good times, and in response to the things that God has done for us, that also is a time for prayer, because it looks toward God who can do all things and gives thanks to him who can do all things. Yes, to give thanks to God for the things he has done is just as much a time to pray as when we need something from the Lord.

"Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church and let them pray over him." We should also pray for one another. When someone else is struggling, when someone else is sick, when someone else has financial troubles, when someone else is going through a dark valley, that also is a time for prayer. Because, Christians, we're in this together. We struggle together. We suffer together. We rejoice together, because we are the body of Christ. But you will note where the power of prayer comes from when James says "the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up." That is our trust. That is where all of this is coming from, knowing that God is the one who can do all things. And when we pray for one another, we can also pray to be forgiven, to ask forgiveness from the Lord, and he will answer.

So, in every circumstance, Christians, and in every trouble, we ought to come to the Lord, not thinking that it's too small or that it's something that's not worth the Lord's time. He cares for you in every circumstance, good, bad, or otherwise, because he is the powerful Lord who can do all things. So when you come to him, pray. Take up that mighty, powerful, living thing, and know that the Lord will answer that prayer, because Jesus is the one who has given us himself, and God has promised to hear you in Jesus. Nothing is too big. Nothing is too small. Bring him what troubles you, and give thanks for what he has answered, because Jesus loves to hear prayer.

To God who hears and to God who answers prayer, be all glory, honor, and worship, now and forever. Amen.