

¹³ Is any one of you in trouble? He should pray. Is anyone happy? Let him sing songs of praise. ¹⁴ Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord. ¹⁵ And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him up. If he has sinned, he will be forgiven. ¹⁶ Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective. ¹⁷ Elijah was a man just like us. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years. ¹⁸ Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops.

Dear fellow believers in the way, the truth, and the life,

It's one of my favorite Bible stories. There is Elijah – a bit of a crabby old man if you ask me – staring down not 50, not 100, but 450 prophets of Baal. Many of the Jewish onlookers had probably at least dabbled in the religion of the true God and the religion of the false idol Baal. We know King Ahab was only interested in Baal.

It was a challenge, but you know how it ended (Read 1 Kings 18). Elijah prayed to the Lord, (1 Kings 18:36-37) *At the time of sacrifice, the prophet Elijah stepped forward and prayed: "O LORD, God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, let it be known today that you are God in Israel and that I am your servant and have done all these things at your command. ³⁷ Answer me, O LORD, answer me, so these people will know that you, O LORD, are God, and that you are turning their hearts back again."*

Don't you wish you could have that kind of response to your prayers? What if I told you that the one true God listens to your prayer and answers them with all the consideration that he did Elijah? This is what God promises to you in his word.

1

(16-18) Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective. ¹⁷ Elijah was a man just like us. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years. ¹⁸ Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops.

The first question that comes to my mind when I hear those words is: What is a righteous man? It's pretty easy to look at the example we give about Elijah. Elijah was a prophet. He was chosen by the Lord and sent out to speak God's Word to a group of people who were as wicked as their King and Queen, Ahab & Jezebel. So, of course Elijah was a righteous man.

It would be so easy to look at Elijah's qualities and think they were unique to him. But the fact that Elijah was righteous was a quality that was given to him, just like it is to you and me. Elijah's righteousness came about the same way it comes to you and me. It's not by something we have done or because there is some indelible imprint on him that others do not have. Did you catch those words? *Elijah was a man just like us.* He was righteous because his Lord offered that righteousness to him as a free gift through his promises. Elijah believed that promise. Faith in God's promise made him a righteous man.

That is why James' words speak not just to people 2000 years ago, but to you and me personally today. The love of God has extended that same promise to you and me. He offers it to us in the perfect life of Jesus. Jesus' death and resurrection assure us that this

righteousness has been accepted by God the Father. He offers it freely to all of us through our Baptisms and in his promise. It is ours through faith.

That faith is what continues to lead us to confess our sins to each other. We know just how important that righteousness is. It is so important that it makes our prayers powerful. So powerful, that it gave Elijah the ability to pray for it to stop raining, and then three and a half years later to pray for it to begin raining. It made it possible and confident that he could offer the prayer that I read for you earlier when he was standing before the 450 prophets of Baal and all of Israel. Christ made his prayer powerful.

Jesus Christ makes our prayers powerful too. It's important for us to really get our arms around that and spiritually sink our teeth into that promise because it really changes our outlook on prayer. It means you have the power to bring all of those mundane little things that concern and annoy you to your Lord – and you can be certain that he hears you. But you are not limited there! You also have the power to pray for world peace, a cure for cancer, or even for it to rain. God promises that your prayers are powerful because of what Jesus Christ has done for you and the only limits you have to your prayers are the limits of your faith and your imagination. Christ makes your prayer powerful!

2

A very American question at a time like this might be, “Ok, I’m glad that my prayer is powerful, but will it be answered?” Or, more simply, “Does it work?” This is what God says: (13-15) *Is any one of you in trouble? He should pray. Is anyone happy? Let him sing songs of praise.* ¹⁴ *Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord.* ¹⁵ *And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him up. If he has sinned, he will be forgiven.*

Prayer is so effective that it can cause three and a half years of drought and then bring those same three and a half years of drought to an end. It is so effective that God can answer it with fire from the sky. It can heal those who are sick.

How can my prayer be that effective? It already is. But you don't have to take a seminar on the way to make your prayers more effective. There are no books, nor do you need some kind of vast experience to make your prayer effective. It becomes effective through Christ working in you. That, and that alone, makes prayer effective. Christ makes it effective.

I know that is difficult some times because it wouldn't be unusual to say, “Wait a minute! I've prayed lots of time and didn't get what I prayed for. So how can you say my prayer is just as effective as Elijah's?” The answer is that the same God makes us both righteous and that righteousness from Christ is what makes prayer effective. God does not grant selfish prayers or prayers that will ultimately harm us. God does not grant prayers that are not in accord with his will.

So, if there is one key to making our prayers more effective, it is in better knowing the will of God. Relying on the promise in our baptism, being strengthened in our faith through the Lord's Supper will certainly make Christ stronger in our hearts. But knowing the will of God better so that we know how to pray according to it will also guide our prayers. That only comes through studying the Bible repeatedly. But know this our prayers are effective, they are answered – every single one. Sometimes with a yes,” sometimes with a, “no,” and sometimes with a, “let me think about it.” But those prayers work every single time. Why? Christ makes all CHRISTIAN PRAYER POWERFUL & EFFECTIVE. Amen.