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The Prayer of Elijah

1 Kings 18:41-46

Prayer: *Father God, I do thank you for your grace, I thank you for your wisdom, I thank you for all that you've done for us. I thank you for people paying attention to things that I'm not paying attention to. And Father, again we just pray as we go through your word this morning that we would have the presence of your Holy Spirit, that you would be guiding us, leading us into your truth. And we are just thankful for Elijah and all of the lessons that he has for us and again, as we go back there today, Lord, I pray for your Spirit to guide us into his truth, that we might again see principles there that are of lasting value. And I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Well, like I said, we are back with Elijah and our text this morning picks up on the events that took place right after God has done this spectacular miracle. Israel hasn't seen a drop of rain for three years as their punishment for having abandoned the true God and had turned to the worship of the gods of Baal and Asherah and Elijah, God's prophet, has confronted wicked King Ahab at the

height of the drought, and so together they have decided on a contest to decide who the real God is. And so the priests of Baal and Elijah both place their sacrifice on the altar and God causes flames to come out from the sky completely consuming only the sacrifice of Elijah. Elijah uses the opportunity to have the prophets of Baal executed and then he announces something that we saw at the very beginning of this chapter in 1 Kings 18. This is something that God had told Elijah in advance to announce, and that was that the three-year drought was about to come to an end. So in *1 Kings 18:41* it says: *And Elijah said to Ahab, "Go up, eat and drink, for there is a sound of the rushing of rain."* Now Elijah didn't make that announcement solely because he had won this great contest. He made the announcement because God told him previously that he was to reestablish contact with Ahab and that the drought indeed was going to come to an end. This is exactly what God told Elijah at the very beginning of 1 Kings in *1 Kings 18:1*. It says: *After many days the word of the LORD came to Elijah, in the third year, saying, "Go, show yourself to Ahab, and I will send rain upon the earth."*

So after seeing God unleash this spectacular miracle on Mount Carmel, Elijah then announces to Ahab that rain at last is on its way, and then he heads up to the mountaintop to pray in the rain. Verse 42 says: *So Ahab went up to eat and drink. And Elijah went*

up to the top of Mount Carmel. And he bowed himself down on the earth and he put his face between his knees. Well, I want you to picture Elijah. Now you've just by yourself all alone stood up against the mighty prophets of Baal, you have withstood against wicked King Ahab and his wicked Queen Jezebel, you've seen God do abundantly beyond your greatest expectation, and now flushed with the realization that God himself has called you to this very task, that he has told you I'm sending you up to the -- to the mountaintop to announce the start of the rains and the end of the drought, and so you're going to tell Ahab get ready, it's time for you to start getting soaked, and you go up to the top, you bow down to the earth with your face between your knees, and you begin your final triumphant prayer signaling the end of this three-year drought.

Now I want you to kind of freeze that image of Elijah in your mind for a moment because God has much to say about this in the New Testament as well as in 1 Kings. A while back we looked at the book of James and at the subject of prayer itself and the example that James chooses to use in his discussion of prayer is exactly where we've frozen this frame. So let's go to James and see what he has to say about this particular moment in time. This is in the New Testament in James 5, starting at verse 16, he's speaking about Elijah. He says: *The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man*

avails much. *Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain; and it did not rain on the land for three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth produced its fruit.* So James is giving us some additional information about this prayer that Elijah uttered. In fact he's giving us three additional points of information: Number 1, it was effective; number 2, it was fervent; and number 3, it came from a righteous man. I pointed out in my messages in James that as effective as Elijah's prayer was, we have no record of what the words that he used were that started the drought or the actual prayer that ended it. Perhaps God didn't want the words written down because he knew that we would probably misuse them in some kind of formulaic way like the Lord's prayer is often misused today. But what we do know about Elijah's prayer is that it was for something that God had already verbally promised. So that makes that different from any other prayer that you and I might pray. You see, when we pray for something, it's always in the hope that God is going to grant our request. But it's also in the uncertainty that we really don't know how to pray. I mean, *Romans 8:26* says: *In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans.* Elijah had no such uncertainty. He was met with God himself and told specifically in *1 Kings 18:1* what was going to happen next. Again:

After a long time, in the third year, the word of the LORD came to Elijah: "Go and present yourself to Ahab, and I will send rain on the land." So Elijah didn't have to guess. He didn't have to speculate as to when and where the drought was going to end because God specifically and verbally instructed him on its beginning and on its end. All he had to do was show up. In 1 Kings 18:2 it says: So Elijah went to present himself to Ahab; and there was a severe famine in Samaria. Well, we know that his prayer three years earlier had been effective at starting the drought because James tells us so and because we also know that the drought that he called for had devastated Israel. But that's only one part of the three parts that James is pointing out when he tells us that this prayer was effective. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much. At the very next verse in scripture James alludes to the second issue. He says: Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain; and it did not rain on the land for three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth produced its fruit.

Elijah was a man with a nature like ours. See, Elijah was a fallen, sinful son of Adam just like you and me, and James wanted to make certain that his congregation understood that. You see, James was dealing with a very human congregation made up mostly of converted Jews who looked on Elijah as somebody spiritually larger

than life. And because Elijah's answer to prayer was so spectacular, people could be tempted to place their faith in Elijah rather than in the God that Elijah prayed to. So James makes certain that we understand that Elijah was a man with a nature like ours. And in telling us that Elijah was no different than you and me, James makes it clear that Elijah was as utterly lost as we all are before the face of a holy God. Elijah may have been God's prophet but he was still one of us when it came to his understanding of his own fallen nature. God describes that nature in *Ephesians 2:1*, he says this: *And you were dead in your trespasses and sins in which you previously walked according to the ways of this world, according to the ruler who exercises authority over the lower heavens, the spirit now working in the disobedient. We too all previously lived among them in our fleshly desires, carrying out the inclinations of our flesh and thoughts, and we were by nature children under wrath as others were also. Romans 3:10* also says: As it is written: "THERE IS NONE RIGHTEOUS, NO, NOT ONE." And so if *Ephesians* tells us that we are by nature children of wrath and *Romans* tells us there is none righteous, no not one, well then how can James tell us that Elijah's effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much? I mean, where did Elijah's righteousness come from if he didn't possess it in the first place? I mean, our faith teaches us that righteousness does not come from us, that it comes from Christ who traded his

righteousness for our sin at the cross. So we take on Christ's righteousness when we trust him as our Lord and Savior.

But what if you lived before Jesus? I mean, Elijah lived and died in the Old Testament. He lived hundreds of years before Jesus was even born. And for that matter, where did any of the Old Testament patriarchs get their righteousness from? They have to wait for Jesus for that? Well, the answer is no. You see, as believers in Jesus Christ, we accept by faith that God became a man, that he entered into space and time, that he lived a perfect life and offered up that perfect life in exchange for my sin. Now we have been made righteous not by any works that we do but by the faith that we place in Jesus Christ and his righteousness. *Ephesians 2:8* says: *For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.* And so because we have been saved through faith, we have a righteousness but it doesn't emanate from us. We have a righteousness that doesn't emanate from our keeping God's law. It emanates from Christ. *Romans 3:21* says: *That is, God's righteousness through faith in Jesus Christ, to all who believe, since there is no distinction. For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. They are justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.*

See, Elijah didn't know Jesus from Adam, but he, like Abraham, placed his faith not in his own goodness or in his ability to keep God's law but in God and God's provision for his sin. Again, *Romans 4:1* says this: What then shall we say that Abraham our father has found according to the flesh? For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does the scripture say? "ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS ACCOUNTED TO HIM FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS." Understand what God is saying here, whether you're Abraham or Elijah in the Old Testament or Matthew, Mark, Sue, or Mary in the New Testament, we are all still saved by faith. For Abraham and Elijah, it was faith in God's provision for sin which for them was through the blood of a sacrificed animal. God said in *Leviticus 17*: *For the life of a creature is in the blood, and I have appointed it to you to make atonement on the altar for your lives, since it is the life blood that makes atonement.* Now, that animal blood was a picture of the blood of Jesus Christ who was the Lamb of God born to take away the sins of the world. But that animal blood was only a symbol, it was only a picture. It could only cover sins; it could not remove them. Abraham and Elijah didn't know Jesus and so they trusted in what God had given to them to provide a means for their sins to be dealt with. And in their case it was the blood of an innocent animal that painted a picture of what would happen when the blood of God himself would be shed to cover their sins. So they look

forward to a day when the symbolic blood of animals will be replaced with the actual blood of Jesus dying on the cross even though they had no idea of the particulars of how God would redeem the world through Jesus Christ. I mean, Abraham had only a very limited knowledge of the future. He knew that God would bless the entire world through his offspring and so he looked at his son Isaac to God's future fulfillment of the need for a savior for mankind. Many years later Jesus was born from that very same line of Isaac. And Jesus himself said in *John 8:56*: "*Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad.*" So what we have here is Abraham and Elijah, they both looked forward to a cross they never saw, and they looked forward to it by trusting in the blood of a sacrificed animal. We look backwards. We look backwards to an already accomplished sacrifice where the Lamb of God has already taken away the sins of the world by shedding his blood on the cross. And all of us, whether we look forward to the cross like Elijah or Abraham or backward from the cross like we do, well we're made righteous not through good deeds, not through keeping God's law, but by faith in God's provision. So Elijah's prayer was effective because James tells us so and because we saw its results; there was this tremendous three-year drought. And Elijah was also righteous even though Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, because by faith he, too, had trusted in God's provision for sin. *And the effective, fervent prayer of a*

righteous man avails much.

So we know that Elijah's prayer was effective because of the drought, we know that it was righteous because Elijah trusted in God's provision for his righteousness, and that leaves only the third question. That's the question of fervency. And that brings us back to Mount Carmel. Now, Elijah has just soundly and utterly defeated one of the greatest physical and spiritual foes Israel has ever faced. He has seen God's miraculous power slice down from heaven to consume not only the bull on the altar but also the wood and the stones and the water itself, they're all vaporized by this stunning, miraculous power of God. The prophets of Baal have been executed. And Elijah has now told the wicked King Ahab to prepare for the rain that God's already told him that he's going to be sending. *1 Kings 18:42: So Ahab went up to eat and drink. And Elijah went up to the top of Carmel; then he bowed down on the ground, and put his face between his knees.* Again, I want you to get this picture of Elijah. For Elijah, this is the top, this is the peak, this is the culmination of everything, this is the piece de resistance, this is the coup de grace, this is spiking the football in the end zone, and it's all rolled up into one final display of God's power and glory in this incredible rainstorm that Elijah is now going to pray in. Like I said, we don't have the actual words to Elijah's prayer but it's safe to say that he was

praying triumphantly for rain, again rain that he knew God was sending. And we know that he prayed that because of what he said next in verse 43, it says: *And (he) said to his servant, "Go up now, look toward the sea."* You know, perhaps his prayer went something like this: Lord, thank you for this magnificent triumph. By your grace and by your power we have defeated the prophets of Baal, we have glorified your name and we are about to restore Israel with the rains that you have promised. I mean, I don't know what he prayed, it doesn't say, so I'm merely guessing. So he sends his servant onward and the servant comes back with this message. It says: *So he went up, and looked, and said, "There's nothing."* What? Again *1 Kings 18:43: Then he said to his servant, "Go up and look toward the sea." So he went up, looked, and said, "There's nothing." Seven times Elijah said, "Go back."* So Elijah said, "Go again." I imagine his response to his first failure would be to simply kind of re calibrate and retry. The response to his second attempt: "Nothing." He said, "Go again." So by the third time I'm guessing Elijah is wondering what he's doing wrong. Still nothing. Said, "Go again." By the fourth time, I know if it was me I would begin to start wondering, did I really hear God correctly when he said in *1 Kings 18:1: "Go present to yourself to Ahab, and I will send rain on the earth"?* You see, we know what God said because we have the script as it were. But I also know how easy it is to start thinking that our

minds are playing tricks on us.

I mentioned this a few years back. This happened to us. Janice and I were walking down the street that we always go walking down, and as we're walking down the street, I was looking ahead of me, about a hundred yards up the road I saw a garbage can strewn all over the road, this was -- I think it was in the spring and typical of when the bears are out and you see that kind of stuff and there's garbage all over the place, and I was looking at it and I was saying to Janice that obviously a bear had done that. We got closer and there was a dead woodchuck right next to the garbage can. And I remember saying to Janice, I said, "Well, this is really weird. Why in the world would a bear eat the garbage when he had the dead woodchuck right there that he could have eaten? Why didn't he touch it?" And at that point Janice looked right at me and said in the coolest of tones, she said, "Well, I don't know, but he's right there." And so I looked over and I'm -- 15 feet away from us was a very large bear and he was sitting on the side of the road eating garbage. And so I was just so shocked and so stunned, I just said, "Just keep walking, just keep walking." So we just walked right past him. We were both experiencing cognitive dissonance. You know, that's where your eyes send your brain some information and your brain hears the information, says nah, nah, I don't want to believe that. I mean, 'cause this -- I mean, we were

looking at this creature and it was a very large black bear, and our brains were saying we prefer not to believe that. But the amazing thing is that when it was all over, we were saying to ourselves, did we really see that? I mean, did that really happen? And if we didn't have each other, I guarantee you I would have started to doubt minutes later whether or not that really happened.

And so I'm guessing after the fourth time Elijah's beginning to wonder if his mind is playing tricks on him. So he goes back to prayer for a fifth time. He says, "Go again." You see, he kept sending his servant because he couldn't see and he couldn't pray at the same time and that had to do with the fervency with which he was praying. Again *1 Kings 18:42*, it says: *And Elijah went up to the top of Carmel; and he bowed down on the ground and put his face between his knees.* You see, Elijah's posture says everything that needed to be said about how fervently he's praying. To be on your knees is to humble yourself before God. To be on your knees with your face so low to the ground that it touches your knees is to assume a position of abject humility. So what was Elijah praying? Well, God doesn't give us the actual words that Elijah prayed but he does tell us that his prayer was effective, and so we know from scripture that that rules out religious posturing and vain repetition because God doesn't answer those prayers. So we know that Elijah was not repeatedly chanting some kind of mantra in the

hopes that by his many words he was going to be heard. So then what was he doing? Well, have you ever sought something in prayer and somewhat like Elijah, what you hear repeatedly is what Elijah heard: Nothing? There's no indication of how long each of these individual prayer sessions took but it's clear that Elijah fervently continued in prayer. And so we ask but why this failure? I mean, why did Elijah need to keep repeating himself when God had already promised him directly I'm going to bring rain.

Anyone who's ever given any thought to prayer has had to wrestle with the idea of God's sovereignty when it comes to prayer. You know, if God is in charge of every single molecule in the universe, if he perfectly knows and understands the past, the present, and the future, then what is the point of me adding my two cents to his providential intentions? Am I going to instruct God? Am I going to give God some new insight, some new information that he didn't have so he can say, "Oh, thanks, Tom, I didn't know that." I mean, what could God possibly want or need with my prayer? And yet we know over and over and over again God doesn't just instruct us to pray, he commands us to pray. In *1 Thessalonians 5:17* he says: *Pray continually.* In *Ephesians 6:18* he says: *And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people.* Why? I've said this over and over and over again,

but it's so important to remember. There is a proxy war that is going on right now and it is a proxy war between two kingdoms. There's the kingdom of light and the kingdom of darkness and they are at war. And as I've said before, the war spilled out into flesh and Ahab and Jezebel represented the darkness and Elijah represented the light. But this is a war that's been going on since the dawn of time. This is a war that started in heaven itself. Listen to what *Revelation 12:7* says. It says: *And war broke out in heaven: Michael and his angels fought with the dragon; and the dragon and his angels fought, but they did not prevail, nor was a place found for them in heaven any longer. So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was cast to the earth, and his angels were cast out with him.*

See, that war that started in heaven, it's down here right now, it's continuing, it's ongoing. The serpent was cast down and he won a great victory, got Adam and Eve, the creatures who were created in God's own image to rebel against their Creator and cause the entire creation to fall. You know, Jesus came into that creation to glorify his Father by ransoming and rescuing a people who had already been captured and oppressed by an enemy. In *Luke 4:18* Jesus says: *"He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives, to set at liberty those who are oppressed."* Jesus also

came as an invading force who was intent on destroying the strongholds that the enemy had already set up. *1 John 3:8* says: *For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil.* Now, how do you suppose God had elected to accomplish this task? I mean, after all, it was God who created Satan in the first place. I mean he certainly had the power to destroy him and his angels and all of his evil works. But God in his wisdom has elected not to destroy the power of Satan with power itself but with a power far greater and far more costly to employ. See, there's a weapon that God chooses to destroy Satan, and that weapon is the power of love. Overwhelming might and power was something that God could have exercised instantly, and it would have cost him nothing as well. He would have been done with Satan forever. But you see, God's essence is love itself and so he's chosen that pathway even though it was extraordinarily costly to him. In fact, it cost him his only Son. *1 John 4:9* says: *In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him.* And so instead of destroying Satan outright with power, God elected to become one of us, to live out his life perfectly and then pay with his life the price his own justice demanded for our sins. God was flawlessly perfect. We were hopelessly imperfect, and by exchanging his righteousness for our sins, he enabled us to once again find a perfection not based on

our performance but on his. And Jesus was relentless in pursuing us not because we are the center of the universe, because we're not; God is, God was, and God will be but by pursuing us, God elected to defeat Satan through the most glorious creature God ever created, the only creature who was created in his very image, and that's us. Jesus pursued God's glory by pursuing us. Jesus poured his love out on us not as an end in itself but as a means to an end so that we could glorify his Father. I mean, we're no match whatsoever for Satan. But any one of us plus God is an Army that can inflict mortal damage on him and on his kingdom and that, by the way, is why we are here. I mean, we're here to imitate Christ and thereby glorify God. So Jesus gave his life to make us worthy to fight for his kingdom. And Elijah today is giving us an insight into what is required to fight that fight. And through Elijah on Mount Carmel, God demonstrated just the tiniest fraction of the raw power he had when he consumed the bull and the sticks and the stones and the water itself. So again we ask, why didn't he just flatten the power that stood behind Baal and Asherah right then and there? Why didn't he once and for all just destroy the devil and his minions? Well, God's angel gave the answer to that question to the prophet Zechariah in *Zechariah 4:6*, and I'm sure you're familiar with this text. God says: "*Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,*" says the LORD of hosts. You see, it's God's will that great victories over great and powerful evil kingdoms

will be accomplished through God's great Holy Spirit working through weak and frail and sinful believers who depend on God alone for that victory.

You know, there's a reason why David and Goliath has become an iconic story representing God's Army versus the power of darkness. If you remember what David said to Goliath, this is in *1 Samuel 17:45*, it says: *Then David said to the Philistine, "You come to me with a sword, with a spear, and with a javelin. But I come to you in the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. This day the LORD will deliver you into my hand, and I will strike you and take your head from you. And this day I will give the carcasses of the camp of the Philistines to the birds of the air and the wild beasts of the earth, that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel. That God, that God wants us to be aware at all times that we are at war. Ephesians 6:12: For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. You see, God is addressing us as if we are on a war footing because we are on a war footing. And furthermore God says, you know, there's a huge cloud of witnesses all surrounding us cheering us on. Hebrews 12 says: Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside*

every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted. So there's Jesus, our supreme example, our supreme commander who sets the example, there's this call: Do not grow weary, do not grow fainthearted.

Now, Elijah has just gone through an experience of God's unlimited power, he's now going through the very same experiences that you and I go through when we go to prayer. I'll tell you what makes me grow weary, I'll tell you what makes me grow fainthearted is when I am praying and praying and praying and I'm feeling everything I'm saying is going unheard. Does that ever happen to you? Have you ever felt that way? What am I doing? See, there's a reason why Elijah is repeatedly hearing a servant say about the rain clouds, "There's nothing." And it has to do with the fervency of the effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man. See, by the fifth and the sixth time Elijah is operating on what faith really, really is. *Hebrews 11:11* says: *Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.* "There's nothing," "There's nothing," "There's nothing." Six times Elijah heard the

servant say, "There's nothing." But he wasn't about to be moved. You see, he knew what God had done and he knew what God had said and he also knew what he had to do. That's why he was still on his knees. You know, fervency is not some kind of emotional state where you just psych yourself into some kind of spiritual action. You know, if that were so, then the prophets of Baal would have won the contest. Remember what they were like, this is *1 Kings 18:28*: *So they crowd aloud, and cut themselves, as was their custom, with knives and lances, until the blood gushed out on them. But there was no voice; no one answered, no one paid attention.* See, God was not looking for some emotional display of spiritual fervency in Elijah; no, he was looking for just what Elijah was doing. He was humbly, abjectly posturing himself before God, repeating what he knew by faith, and whether it was seven times or seventy times seven, Elijah was fervently committed to pray, because if anyone knew he was in a war, it was Elijah.

And the text says: *Seven times he said, "Go again." Then it came to pass the seventh time, that he said, "There is a cloud, as small as a man's hand, rising out of the sea!" So he said, "Go up, say to Ahab, 'Prepare your chariot, and go down before the rain stops you.'*" Now it happened in the meantime that the sky grew black with clouds and wind, and there was a heavy rain. The rains came as Elijah knew they would, because God had told him so. And God is

faithful. But here's what's incredibly important to realize. It still required fervent prayer on Elijah's part. So what makes us think it's any different for us? I mean, the battle is still raging, there is a war that is still on, and I would be lying if I said I've never had times when I've wondered if I just wasn't speaking up into the sky and nobody was hearing when I was praying. I mean, there's times when I have sought God as fervently as I know how and it seems as if the heavens had turned to brass. Just put yourself in Elijah's place. After hearing for the third, fourth, or fifth time that your desperate but not yet effective, fervent prayer, well it seems to be falling on deaf ears. So what do you do? I can't say for certain, but I suspect that Elijah went back to what he did know to give himself confidence in that which he did not yet know. I mean, what he did know is that God had faithfully done everything that Elijah had asked of him, from the miraculous jar of oil, to the raising of the widow's son, to the fire coming down from the sky, and that based on God's faithfulness in the past, he had no reason to doubt his faithfulness in the immediate future. That's how Elijah did it, that's how Abraham did it, and Moses and David and Joseph and Peter and James and John, that's how they all did it. They all went back to what they knew God had already done and they used that experience to forge a confidence in what God was about to do.

Listen to how David did it in *Psalm 40*, this is what he says: *I waited patiently for the LORD; and He inclined to me, and heard my cry. He also brought me up out of a horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my steps. He has put a new song in my mouth -- Praise to our God; many will see it and fear, and will trust in the LORD.* You see, you don't get lifted out of the pit, out of this miry clay until you find yourself into someplace that is miserable, horrible. And whether it's the first, third or sixth attempt, you find if you wait patiently, God will bring you out and he will set your feet on that rock. And when you've been stood back on the rock and you find yourself back again in the pit, it is that past experience which will give you the means to trust in the next one. I mean, that's exactly how God wants us to respond when we are on our third, fourth, fifth attempt and the heavens seem silent. Remember Jesus, Jesus gave us specific stories about the need to keep praying when it seems useless. I mean *Luke 18:1*, it says this: *And he told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart.* In fact he told two parables. He told us in *Luke 11* about a neighbor pounding on the door at midnight needing to borrow some bread, and a woman in *Luke 18* pestering an unjust judge for justice. Both of those stories point to the necessity of fervent, persistent, insistent prayer particularly when the heavens seem silent. It is then that this verse in *2 Corinthians* becomes

critical. See, you have to remember first and foremost the context in which prayer is called for, that context is war. You must remember that we are, all of us, in a war, and we have a great crowd cheering us on; but make no mistake about it, they're cheering us on because this requires constant effort and energy and it's extremely easy to be discouraged. And that verse in 2 *Corinthians 10* says this: *For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ.* See, part of what every one of us has to do particularly when it comes to prayer is what God is calling on us to do, says you need to rope and you need to wrestle and you need to subdue your own thoughts. See, logic and experience will tell us what they probably told Elijah. This isn't working, I mean, this is fruitless, God is not paying any attention whatsoever to me. Furthermore in front of all these people he's mocking me, he's making me look like a fool. You know, logic and experience are rooted in the flesh. But God says: *For though we walk in the flesh, we're not waging war according to the flesh.* He tells us what our ultimate weapon is. Our ultimate weapon is the cross. Everything must go back to the cross. You see, if God loved me enough to take on flesh, to live a perfect life and then be

stripped naked and nailed to a tree in order to rescue me, well then I have to be willing to cut him some slack when life itself seems to be telling me that he doesn't care. Everything has to go back to the cross. *Romans 5:10* says: *For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life.* What God is telling us is if while you were my enemies, if then I laid down my life for you, now that you are my adopted sons and daughters, do you not think I'll do everything I can for your good and my glory? Frankly there's going to be times when that's not obvious at all. You're going to be down on your knees like Elijah was and the word back is going to be "nothing," "nothing," "nothing" over and over again. In addition to that, we have an enemy who delights in whispering in our ears that only a fool would trust a God that requires that level of trust. God is telling us very specifically that for now things are going to appear murky. *1 Corinthians 13:12* he says: *For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: Now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.* If you've ever looked through a beer bottle, you know what it's like to look through a glass darkly. I mean, things are not clear at all, details are missing. It's so easy to miscalculate, misconstrue and misunderstand what we can't clearly see. So God tells us to go back to that which we can see in order to place our trust in that which we can't see. And what we can see with crystal

clarity is the cross.

You know, it's easy to see *John 3:16* becoming cliché but it is -- it is the reality that we hang our lives on. "*For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.*" See, Elijah could only go by what he knew, and he knew that God was faithful no matter how desperate things looked. His prayer was effective because it was rooted in the trust that he had in God, and we know what it accomplished. His prayer was fervent because he wouldn't take no answer for an answer, because he repeatedly bowed and prayed in the face of six straight rejections. His prayer was righteous because he understood that his righteousness came not from himself but by his faith in God's provision for his sin. *The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.* Now in some ways we have an advantage over Elijah in spite of all of the miracles that he performed. See, Elijah had no idea that the same God whose power from heaven would burn up the sacrifice would be the same God who would leave heaven, come to earth and be that sacrifice. We know that God and we know what he's done for us. So when you've bowed and you've prayed and the heavens seem silent, look on Him whom they have pierced. Look to the cross. Let's pray.

Father God, we do thank you for Elijah. I thank you that Elijah went through the angst that he did. I thank you that over and over and over and over and over again he heard "nothing," "nothing," "nothing," "nothing," and yet he persisted, with his face to the ground he persisted. Lord, he knew what he knew, he knew what he could trust. Father, give us the ability to trust in what you have done in our lives so that we can trust in what you're going to do in our lives, and we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.