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The Effective, Fervent Prayer of a Righteous Man Avails Much

James 5:16

Prayer: *Father God, we do again thank you and praise you for your goodness, I thank you and praise you for your word, I'm just amazed, this is our last message in James, it's been the 39th message in James, we are finishing up the book this morning, and Lord, I just want to thank you, I thank your Holy Spirit, I thank you for the grace and the wisdom that you've given to me in the ability to open up your book, the ability to understand what it is that you've given to me and hopefully to be able to communicate some of that to you. I pray this morning as we again for the last time look into the book of James that we would have that same gift, that the Holy Spirit would accompany us, and give us the ability to see it, to hear it, and again, make it a permanent part of our lives. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Well, our text this morning is James 5:16-20. It says this:
Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. 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. Brethren, if anyone among you wanders from the truth and someone turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins.

Let's just briefly look at the first section first. This is James 5:16, it says: *Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed.* And again, James is continuing to expand on the idea of healing that we spoke about last week, and he's including the necessity of mutual confession of sin. If I have wronged you, if I have slandered you or cheated you in any way, I need to confess that sin to God, but I also need to confess it to you. The act of prayer and confession is a powerful combination. God says as much.

James goes on to say in James 5:16: *The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.* I want to spend the bulk of our time this morning taking that statement apart. You see, God is saying here that there are three different parts to prayer that avails much. First off, it must be effective. Okay. What does that mean? Well, sometimes it's helpful to look at what is

ineffective and scripture is very clear about that. Jesus said this in Matthew 6:5-8, speaking of prayer, he said: *"And when you pray, you shall not be like the hypocrites. For they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly. And when you pray, do not use vain repetitions as the heathen do. For they think that they will be heard for their many words. Therefore do not be like them. For your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask him."* So Jesus is kind of laying out here what ineffective prayer is all about, and he's saying is ineffective prayer is outward looking, it's very, very showy, it's full of empty repetition. And understand, God is not forbidding public prayer here. Instead what he is forbidding is the use or the pretense of prayer that is used in order to make people think you're more spiritual than everybody else. That kind of prayer is really worse than no prayer at all. It's the kind of prayer that's got one eye on heaven and one eye on earth and it cares far more what earth thinks than heaven. It's prayer that forgets that God sees right into the very core of our hearts when we pray. Again, Matthew 6:8 proclaims: *"Your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask him."* So praying with any pretense whatsoever is

really a waste of time.

So effective prayer, prayer that Elijah prayed is prayer that is focused on God and focused on truth. Now there are some folks who think that the key to effective prayer is simply tacking Jesus' name onto the end of a prayer, but that's not really what Jesus had in mind. Jesus said in John 14:13: *"And whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask anything in My name, I will do it."* Well, that's not what a lot of people think it means. You know, to ask in someone's name is to ask as if you are that same person. What Jesus is saying here is that if you ask for anything with my heart, my mind, and my soul, your prayer is going to be as effective as mine because it will be the same as mine. You will be praying in my name and I will grant it. So to pray effectively is to pray with heaven in your mind, God on your heart, and truth on your lips.

James 5:16 says: *The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much. Elijah was a man with is 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.* What James is doing here this morning is he's giving us one very small detail of a very elaborate story, that's because he expects that you already

know the rest of the story. And to get that, we really have to go back to scripture. We have to learn a little bit about Elijah. We find out that Elijah was a human being, he was a prophet of God who had a confrontation with a man named Ahab who was no friend whatsoever of God's. 1 Kings 16:30 describes him this way, it says: *Ahab son of Omri did more evil in the eyes of the LORD than any of those before him. He not only considered it trivial to commit the sins of Jeroboam, son of Nebat, but he also married Jezebel daughter of Ethbaal king of the Sidonians, and began to serve Baal and worship him. He set up an altar for Baal in the temple of Baal that he built in Samaria. Ahab also made an Asherah pole and did more to arouse the anger of the LORD, the God of Israel, than did all the kings of Israel before him. Ahab's the bad guy, Elijah's the good guy. Elijah was a prophet sent by God to punish Ahab and all of Israel because under Ahab's rule, Baal worship had become the national religion of Israel. Baal was the god of fertility, he was the god of lightening, the god of the storm. And so God through the prophet Elijah is going directly after Baal by declaring a drought.*

In 1 Kings 17:1, it says this: *Now Elijah the Tishbite, from Tishbe in Gilead, said to Ahab, "As the LORD, the God of Israel lives, whom I serve, there will be neither dew nor rain in the next few years except at my word."* So for a full three years, not a

drop of water fell on Israel, and the entire nation was starving. Of course, Ahab like many other leaders put the blame not on himself but on God and on his prophet. 1 Kings 18:17 says of Ahab: *When he saw Elijah, he said to him, "Is that you, you troubler of Israel?" "I have not made trouble for Israel," Elijah replied. "But you and your father's family have. You have abandoned the LORD's commands and have followed the Baals. Now summon the people from all over Israel to meet me on Mt. Carmel. And bring the four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal and the four hundred prophets of Asherah, who eat at Jezebel's table."* So Ahab sent word throughout all Israel and assembled the prophets on Mt. Carmel. Now, most of us have heard about this confrontation, but I want to point out that James takes us to one particular aspect of it. That's the effective part of the fervent prayer of Elijah. Let me just recapitulate. James is speaking about this part, 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.* Now, as powerful and as effective as Elijah's prayer was, we have no record of his words. We have no record of the words that started the drought or of the actual prayer that ended it. You know, it may be so that perhaps God did not want the words written down thinking that we would also misuse them in some formulaic way, the same way

that the Lord's prayer is often misused today. What was unique about Elijah's prayer is that he was praying for something that God had already verbally promised. You know, when we pray for something, it's always in the hope that God will grant our request but it's also in the uncertainty that we know we really don't know how to pray. 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.* Now Elijah, he had none of that uncertainty. And the reason why is because he was met by God himself and told specifically in 1 Kings 18:1 what was going to unfold, what was going to happen next. It says: *"After a long time, in the third year, the word of the Lord came to Elijah: "Go up 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. Basically all he had to do was show up. 1 Kings 18:2 says: *So Elijah went to present himself to Ahab; and there was a severe famine in Samaria.* So this much we know. We know that Elijah's prayer three years earlier had been effective because, number one, James tells us so, and because we also know that Israel is devastated by this drought. So we know that it's effective. But that's only one part, the first part of the three parts that James points out when he tells us in James 5:16: *The effective, fervent*

prayer of a righteous man avails much.

Well, in the very next scripture, James alludes to our second issue. I'm going to jump to the end of this text instead of the middle, but we'll see. He says this in verse 17, 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.* Key in on verse 17, *Elijah was a man with a nature like ours.* Elijah was a fallen, sinful son of Adam just like you and me. James here is dealing with his congregation who looked on Elijah spiritually, much, much larger than life, and James is trying to take pains to point out that Elijah was no different than you or me. We might say that he in the 21st Century he put on his pants one leg at a time. Elijah probably didn't wear pants but -- but because his answer to prayer was so spectacular, you see, people can be tempted to place their faith in Elijah rather than the God that Elijah was praying to. So James wants to make certain that we understand, as verse 17 says: *Elijah was a man with a nature like ours.* We know God describes that nature in Romans 3:10 by saying: *As it is written: "There is no one righteous, no, not one."* But James tells us that Elijah's *effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.* So the question is where did Elijah's righteousness come from if he didn't

possess it in the first place? And you might add, especially since Elijah was from the Old Testament, he didn't know Jesus Christ. For that matter, where did any of the Old Testament patriarchs get their righteousness from? Did 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 stepped into space and time, that he lived a perfect life and offered that perfect life in exchange for my sin. We have been made righteous not by anything that we do but by the faith that we place in Jesus Christ and his righteousness. Ephesians 2:8-9 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.*

Because we've been saved through faith, we have a righteousness that doesn't come from inside us, it doesn't come from our keeping God's law. It comes from Christ. Romans 3:21 says: *But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. See, the fact is, Elijah didn't know Jesus from Adam. But he, like Abraham, placed his faith not in his goodness and not in his ability to keep God's law but in God and in God's provision for sin. Romans 4:1-3 says this*

about Abraham, it says: *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 for boast about, but not before God. For what does the scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness."* Whether you're Abraham or Elijah in the old testament or Matthew, Mark, Suzy and Mary in the new testament, we are all still saved the exact same way. We are saved by faith. For Abraham and Elijah, it was faith in God's provision for sin which for them was the blood of a sacrificed animal. Abraham and Elijah looked forward to the day when the symbolic blood of animals would be replaced with the actual blood of Jesus Christ dying on the cross. Suzy and Mary today look backwards. They look backwards to an already accomplished sacrifice where the Lamb of God has already taken away the sins of the world. All are made righteous, not through good deeds or by keeping God's law, but by faith in God's provision. So God through faith sees Elijah as righteous.

So to back up, first Elijah's prayer was effective, we know, because James tells us it was so and because we saw the results: Israel is devastated by a drought. Secondly, we know that Elijah was also righteous, even though, as verse 17 says: *Elijah was a man with a nature like ours.* He was righteous because by faith he too had trusted in God's provision for sin. His prayer was

effective and he was righteous. And the scripture says: *The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.* And that leaves only the question of fervency, and that's what brings us back to Mt. Carmel. Again, most of you know the story. Elijah gathers up four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal and four hundred prophets of Asherah for this confrontation involving two bulls on opposing altars. They put the bulls on the altars and then they see which God would accept the sacrifice to prove that he was in fact the real God. So Elijah allows the prophets of Baal to go first. We pick up the story in 1 Kings 18:26 describing the prophets of Baal. It says: *So they took the bull which was given them, and they prepared it, and called on the name of Baal from morning even till noon, saying, "O, Baal, hear us!" But there was no voice; no one answered. Then they leaped about the altar which they had made. And so it was, at noon, that Elijah mocked them and said, "Cry aloud, for he is a god; either he is meditating, or he is busy, or he is on a journey or perhaps he is sleeping and must be awakened." So they cried aloud and cut themselves, as was their custom, with knives and lances, until the blood gushed out on them. And when midday was past, they prophesied until the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice. But there was no voice; no one answered, no one paid attention.*

Now it was Elijah's turn. Elijah first repairs God's broken altar

and then with twelve stones representing the twelve tribes of Israel, he built an altar with the large trench around it on which he lays the bull, but before that, before he calls down fire on the bull, he soaks the bull not once, not twice, but three times he has water dumped on the entire altar. In fact, he pours so much water on the altar that the trench surrounding the altar is filled to overflowing. Then Elijah says this in 1 Kings 18:36, he says:

"LORD God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, let it be known this day that you are God in Israel and I am your servant, that I have done all these things at your word. Hear me, O LORD, hear me, that this people may know that you are the LORD God, and that you have turned their hearts back to you again." Then the fire of the LORD fell and consumed the burnt sacrifice, and the wood and the stones and the dust, and it licked up the water that was in the trench. Now when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces; and they said, "The LORD, he is God! The LORD, he is God!" And Elijah said to them, "Seize the prophets of Baal! Do not let one of them escape!" So they seized them; and Elijah brought them down to the Brook Kishon and executed them there. Then Elijah said to Ahab, "Go up, eat and drink; for there is the sound of abundance of rain."

Okay. Here's where things get very interesting for Elijah, and here is where God through James takes us. God wants us to see

something here. Again, remember our text this morning: *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.* Okay. So James has directed our attention to the prayer that Elijah has prayed to begin and to end this three-year drought, and so before we proceed, it would be helpful to kind of review the situation that Elijah now finds himself in. He has just soundly and utterly defeated one of the greatest physical and spiritual forces Israel has ever faced. He has seen God's miraculous power slicing down from heaven, consuming not only the bull on the altar but also the sticks, the stones and the water itself, I mean, they're all vaporized in this one stunning, miraculous display of power by God. The prophets of Baal have been executed. And Elijah has now told wicked King Ahab to go prepare for the rain that God has already told him he was sending. Again, 1 Kings 18:42, it says: *So Ahab went up to eat and drink and Elijah went up to the top of Caramel; then he bowed down on the ground, and put his face between his knees.* You see, for Elijah this is it, this is the top, this is the peak, this is the culmination of everything, this is the piece de resistance, 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 glory and power. 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. We can know that because of what he said next in verse 43, it says: *And he said to his servant, "Go up now and look toward the sea."* And so we can just theorize what Elijah's prayer must have been. Perhaps it went something like this, "Lord, thank you for this magnificent triumph, thank you for this abundance of rain that you have promised." Elijah's servant comes back bringing a message. And the scripture says: *So he went up and looked, and said, "There's nothing."* What? Just picture Elijah, all of this coming to a head. Servant comes back, nothing. So he says to the servant, "Go up again." I imagine his response to his first failure to be to simply kind of re-calibrate and retry, so the response to his second attempt, nothing. He says to his servant, "Go again." Now by the third time, I imagine Elijah is wondering what he is doing wrong. Servant comes back. Nothing. He says to the servant, "Go again." Now by the fourth time, I know if it was me, I would start to wonder, did I really hear that? Was God really speaking to me? I mean, did he really say in 1 Kings 18:1: *"Go, present yourself to Ahab, and I will send rain on the earth."* I mean, 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.

You know, a few years back, Janice and I were walking down the

street, same street that we always walk down as we usually do, and I mentioned this before, I saw way up ahead of me a garbage can had been turned over and next to the garbage can was a dead animal of sorts, and as we got closer, I saw that it was a dead woodchuck in the middle of the street and the garbage can had been turned over and stuff scattered all over the place, and I remember saying to Janice, "Why in the world would a bear take all of the garbage and strew it all over the street when he had a perfectly good woodchuck right in front of him," and at that point Janice turned at me, looked right at me and cool as a cucumber and said, "I don't know but he's right there." And we looked over and I'm -- 15 feet away from us was a very large black bear sitting on the side of the road eating his garbage. I was so shocked and stunned, I said, "Well, just keep on walking," which we did, right past the bear. But I know this, I know if we didn't have each other to confirm what we saw with our own eyes, I would have been doubting what I saw. If somebody challenged what it was, did that really happen? Is that true?

Well, after the fourth time, perhaps Elijah had begun to wonder if his mind had been playing tricks on him. So he goes back to prayer and for a fifth time he sends his servant, and again he comes back, "nothing." He said, "Go again." You know, he kept sending his servant because he couldn't see and pray at the same time, and that

had to do with the fervency with which he was praying. 1 Kings 18:42 says: *Then Elijah went up to the top of Carmel; then he bowed down on the ground, and put his face between his knees.* You see, Elijah's posture said everything that needed to be said about how fervently he was 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 is touching your knees is to assume the position of abject humility.

So we wonder what was it that Elijah was praying? Like I said, God doesn't give us the actual words that he prayed but he does tell us his prayer was effective. And we know from scripture that that rules out religious posturing and vain repetition. So we know that Elijah was not repeatedly chanting some kind of mantra in the hopes that his many words would get him a hearing. The question is so then what was he doing? Have you ever sought something in prayer? Sought it repeatedly? Only to hear what Elijah heard? There's nothing. Nothing. Elijah's response is our model. You know, there's no indication of how long each of these individual prayer sessions took, but it is clear that Elijah fervently continued in prayer. But we have to ask ourselves what is God doing here? Why this repeated failure? Why did Elijah need to keep representing himself when God had already promised him directly, I'm going to bring rain. Why pray for what you know God is going to do? Anyone

who's ever given any thought to prayer has to wrestle with the idea of God's sovereignty when it comes to prayer. The question is this, if God is in charge of every single molecule in the universe, if he perfectly knows the past, the present, and the future, then really what's the point of my adding my two cents to his providential intentions? Am I going to instruct God? Am I going to give him some new insight, some new information he's going to say, "Oh, thanks, Tom, I didn't know that." What could God possibly want or need from my prayer? One thing we do know. We do know that God over and over and over again doesn't just instruct us to pray. He commands us to, as 1 Thessalonians 5:17 says: *Pray continually.* Ephesians 6:18 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 absolutely critical to remember, and that's this: There is a proxy war going on right now between two great kingdoms. The kingdom of light is at war with the kingdom of darkness. It's a war that started in heaven itself. Revelation 12:7 says this: *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. What it's saying is the war continued down here on earth. He was cast out, here's where he landed. So he arrives on earth and he gets a great victory. He gets Adam and Eve, the creatures created in God's own image to rebel against their creator and caused the entire creation to fall. We understand that Jesus came into creation to glorify his Father by ransoming and rescuing a people who had already been captured by the enemy. Jesus says in Luke 4:18: "He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives, to set at liberty those who are oppressed." Jesus came to undo what the devil had done. 1 John 3:8 says: For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil.

So how do you suppose God has elected to accomplish that task? And after all, we know God created Satan. Now he certainly had the power to destroy him, to destroy his angels and to destroy all 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, a power that in fact 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. You know, Jesus gave us his life to make us worthy to fight for his kingdom. Elijah gives us an insight into what is required to fight that fight. Through Elijah*

on Mt. 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 we wonder why didn't he just flatten the power that stood behind the Baals and the Asherah, why didn't he just once and for all just destroy the devil and all of his minions? Well, God's angel gave an answer to Zechariah in Zechariah 4:6, it says: *So he answered and said to me: "This is the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel: '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, frail, sinful believers, believers who depend on God for that victory. You know, it's as if God is saying to the devil himself, I'm not going to defeat you. They are.

There's a reason why David and Goliath has become such an iconic story representing God's army versus the power of darkness. Do you remember what David said to Goliath? Just picture this little pip squeak gets this nine foot behemoth. In 1 Samuel 17, 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 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's the God who wants us to be aware at all times that we are at war. And our primary weapon is prayer. You know, there's a reason why Elijah repeatedly heard his servant say, "There is nothing." It has to do with the fervency of *the effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man availing much.* See, by the fifth and sixth time, Elijah had to be operating on what faith really is. Hebrews 11:1 tells us: *Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.* Six times Elijah hears his servant say, "There's nothing." But he was not about to be moved. He knew what God had done, he knew what God had said, he also knew what he had to do. That's why he was still on his knees. But you know fervency is not an emotional state where you simply just psych yourself up to do something. You know, if that were so, the prophets of Baal would have won that contest hands down. Remember what 1 Kings says about them, it says: *So they cried 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.* God was not looking for some emotional display of spiritual fervency in Elijah. 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 times, Elijah was committed fervently to pray, 'cause if anyone knew there was a war going on, it was Elijah. He had just come out of it. Scripture says: *Seven times he said, "Go again." Then it came to pass the seventh time, that he said, "There's 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 became black with clouds and wind, and there was a heavy rain. The rains came as Elijah knew that they would. Why? Because God told him so, and God is faithful. But it still required fervent prayer on Elijah's part.

So what makes us think we are any different than Elijah? You know, the battle is still raging. The war is still on. The weapons of prayer that we use is no different than the one Elijah used. It's providential that James finishes up his book with these words. This is what he says in verse 19, he says: *Brethren, if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins.* I say it's providential because it uniquely applies to us today. I want to show you how that does. We have a group in the church called POPS which stands for Parents of Prodigals. We meet once a month on the second Wednesday of each month, and we meet to pray for the

salvation of the prodigals that each of us have in our lives. We've been praying for this group of prodigals -- I think there was 28 -- for the past year now. And we believe, we are believing like Elijah is believing, that *the effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much*. And so we've learned this morning to pray effectively is to pray with heaven on your mind, God in your heart, and truth on your lips. So we aim to pray effectively. We also pray like Elijah, knowing that, as verse 17 says: *Elijah was a man with a nature like ours*. We pray as those who are righteous enough to boldly come into the throne of God, not on the basis of our righteousness but on the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ. And finally, we pray fervently, knowing that this is war, knowing that we have a vital part to play in it. We pray knowing what God has done through Christ, knowing what God has said in his word about his love for the lost and knowing what God expects us to do in prayer. Now, I'd be lying if I said we hadn't had a few times this past year where we've gotten a little wobbly. Basically all of us heard what Elijah heard: Nothing. But we kept at it. At our last Parents of Prodigals meeting, we had a ceremony. We had the pleasure of moving two names from the lost column to the found column. The effectual, fervent prayer of those made righteous in Christ had indeed availed much. You see, God is determined to defeat the enemy of our souls, and his main weapon of choice is you. You have privilege and responsibility beyond your

wildest imagination just waiting for you to grab ahold of. You know, God wants search and rescue teams and he wants you to be part of those, and the stakes couldn't possibly be higher. Again, verse 19: *Brethren, if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins.* Jesus once described attacking the enemy as tying him up so that you can then plunder his house. Well, we tied the enemy up. We tied the enemy up through prayer and then Jesus plundered his house, and the loot was not gold or silver or jewels, the loot was eternal souls. Folks, it doesn't get any better than that, and it's all a matter of realizing the power, the power that God has given to each of us. *The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.* Let's pray.

Father God, I do thank you for giving us in your word the understanding of what "effective" means, for giving us through your word and through your Son's death the ability to be a righteous person standing before you. Lord, it's that fervency part that I pray that you would continue to expand and give to us. Give us the ability like Elijah, six times in a row standing -- kneeling there, hearing nothing, nothing, nothing, nothing, nothing, nothing, and yet staying the course, fervently seeking Your will even though he knew what Your will was. Father, give us that as a model of

fervency, give us that as a model of consistency, enable us to focus our eyes on Elijah when we are in our periods where all we hear is nothing, and I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.