

CHRISTIANS FIGHT BEST ON THEIR KNEES

Pastor Colin Rieke ~ May 29, 2016



¹³ Is anyone among you in trouble? Let them pray. Is anyone happy? Let them sing songs of praise. ¹⁴ Is anyone among you sick? Let them call the elders of the church to pray over them and anoint them 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 them up. If they have sinned, they 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 person is powerful and effective. (James 5:13-16)

This is the day the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it,

One of the classic adventure movies of all time is *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*. While having both Harrison Ford and Sean Connery is usually a recipe for success, another part of what makes this movie so great is that it ties into the legend of the Holy Grail from the Middle Ages. Crusades were made in the Middle Ages in search for the actual cup that Jesus used in the Last Supper when he instituted Holy Communion. What was so special about this Holy Grail? According to legend, this cup not only was used during the Last Supper, but it also collected some of the blood of Jesus at his crucifixion. It was also said to have mystical powers like rewarding the drinker with youth and health.

Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade follow along the path that so many adventurers had done before them looking for this mystical treasure. Along the way they face enemies intent on preventing them to find the grail, or beat them to it. Once they finally make their way to the temple where the Holy Grail supposedly lay, they and their Nazi counterparts are challenged by three protective booby traps intent on keeping the Grail safe from the unworthy.

Each of the booby traps has a clue to getting past the obstacle. The first clue is simply “Only the penitent man will pass.” For those of you who have seen the movie, you know exactly what happens. At the last moment, Indy understands what the clue means as he hears the whirring of a giant circular saw and quickly falls to his knees before it has a chance to decapitate him. It was falling to his knees, in the traditional stance for prayer, which saved Indy from the first of three obstacles.

I am assuming that you have never quite been in the situation of Indiana Jones in that movie where the only position you could take to save yourself would have been falling down to your knees in prayer. But really, that scene is a perfect image of what prayer is all about, and we should consider falling down to our knees more often as a solution to the challenges and obstacles we face in our life. Because what Indiana Jones and the Apostle James teach us this morning, is that **CHRISTIANS FIGHT BEST ON THEIR KNEES**.

1. It is a reminder of who's in charge
2. It is a reminder of our love

(1)

The words we consider this morning come from the Apostle James. Many think this is the same James who was the half-brother of Jesus. It was James who became a prominent figure in the early Christian Church, with much of his ministry being done in and around the Jerusalem area among Christians with Jewish background. It is the book of James that has confused Christians at times, because it seems to say things that are in conflict with other parts of God's Word, specifically in matters dealing with how to be saved.

There are places in the book that James seems to be saying that we are not saved by Grace alone, but by grace followed by actions on our own part. When in reality, James is saying nothing different than the other writers, he is merely defending the faith from a different attack, the attack of laziness. One thing that James could not stand was a "phony faith." People who said they were Christians, but did not demonstrate any actions in their lives that they were Christians. This was similar to what Jesus said about the vine and its branches. When branches are connected into the vine (Christ), those branches will bear fruit. James, like Jesus, was not saying that bearing fruit saves you, but that it shows evidence of Christ working in you.

Throughout the letter, James gives countless examples of how this is done, and how this is not done. In the last chapter of his book, he first addresses the "phony Christians" who use God's name to validate any and every action they take, not unlike some Christians today who say "God spoke to me and told me to go and do this" as validation for their own choices. Instead of using God's name this way, James says to use God's name in prayer. Prayer is a God's gift to his people to help themselves not as helpless prisoners of fate but active participants in how God directs his world. This is why CHRISTIANS FIGHT BEST ON THEIR KNEES, because it is a reminder of who's in charge.

For many other people, they love to think that they are in charge of their own life, their own emotions, their own destiny. And while that makes for great motivational posters, it simply is not true. Sure there are certain things that we can be in control of, but there are far more that are far beyond us and our capability to handle. We can be the best employee we can be, but you have no control whether you get fired, you have no control over the economy or the weather which could influence your being laid off, you have no control over whether you might actually wake up in the morning or whether you'll get to work safely. This is just one simple example of how little we actually control.

While the world may think of Christians as being out of touch with reality, in some ways we are more in touch with reality than the world. We realize we cannot control outside influences, we cannot control the weather, we cannot even control how long we are going to live, and so when we fall down on our knees in prayer, it's a reminder of who's in charge. That's why James says, **"Is anyone among you in trouble? Let them pray. Is anyone happy? Let them sing songs of praise."** In whatever circumstance – good or bad – get down on your knees and acknowledge who's in control.

Sometimes that's easier said than done. Sometimes, it's easier to give that statement lip service, but our actions are slow to follow suit. Prayer is one of those things that should be an active part of a Christian life, but somehow, I don't think it is, at least not the way that God intends it. You want to see a way that God intends it? Then look to our first lesson this morning with Abraham's "prayer."

In that story, Abraham is speaking with God, not unlike how we speak with God in our prayers (although Abraham had the advantage of a direct response from God). He is praying for the deliverance of the wicked cities of Sodom and Gomorrah where his nephew Lot lived. Asking God to spare the city if there are 50 righteous people inside, 45 people, 40, 30, 20, and finally only if 10 righteous people lived in the city. Each time God answered Abraham's prayer that he would spare the city if he found that number of righteous living there. Abraham was never "in charge" of the situation, God could have answered "no" whenever he wanted. But yet, through Abraham's request, God's mind was changed.

I'll honestly say, my prayer life isn't what it should be. And that's not just me as a pastor saying I need to be better, it's me as a sinful human being saying that I have not always considered getting down on my knees (in other words praying) a priority. My most oft used excuse is "God knows what I'm going through and he'll do what's best." Just imagine if Abraham had taken that approach. "Yea, I know my nephew is there, but God knows what he is doing, so I won't worry about it." For one thing, this can show a neglect of God's Word, but more importantly, it fails to make use of a gift God has given us.

Just imagine if for instance, your parents gave you a car for your 18th birthday. But instead of using that car, you walked everywhere, you rode the bus, you caught rides with friends for no other reason than you wanted to do it on your own. You would be spurning a gift your parents gave you to make your life better. That's just what we do when we spurn God's gift of prayer. A gift intended to be a blessing in our life, but by forsaking it, we see just how foolish we are.

Enter Jesus, stage left. The perfect one who from our perspective would have no need for prayer, still prayed. And he prayed a lot. He made prayers a priority. He even taught his disciples how to pray. And one of the most significant prayers he made, he made on his knees in a place called Gethsemane. "Father, if there's any other way to save humanity than me dying on a cross, please do it. But not my will, but yours be done." And the Father's will was done, the only way to save us not only from our careless disregard of prayer, but from every other sin which marked us for hell. Those charges were instead leveled against Jesus on the cross – paid and accounted for.

(2)

When we get down on our knees to pray, or in whatever position we pray in, we not only are reminded who is in charge, but it is a reminder of our love for him. In love, we confess our sins, in love we sing songs of praise, in love we pray for others. This happens when our prayers are spontaneous, spur of the moment prayers, or when our prayers are carefully thought out and written down.

Jesus' disciples asked him how to pray, and he gave them what we now know as the Lord's Prayer. We have that recorded in our gospel for this morning. It's also a prayer that we include in just about every one of our services. And while it's true that such repetition can lead us to take it for granted, that's

not the fault of the prayer, but of our own sinful nature. Because in the Lord's Prayer, we have a wonderful example of what exactly to pray for.

When you take a look at the Lord's Prayer, you see request after request about spiritual matters – about God's hallowed name, God's kingdom, forgiveness of sins, and only one request about earthly matters – give us today our daily bread. In them, we see the emphasis God places upon the spiritual matters, the matters that will last beyond this world, but he still also wants us to pray for the earthly and physical things. A summary of the way to pray is written by James when he says, **“the prayer offered in faith.”** A prayer offered in faith is one that recognizes our place as creatures in God's creation, it's recognizing who is in control, and it is also recognizing that we are to pray to God like we are to talk to a loving father.

It is out of love for him that we confess our sins to one another, it is out of love for him that we desire to resist temptation, it is out of love for him that we get down on our knees and pray. Do you want a very simple, very practical word of advice that you can start doing right away? This is just one way to get accustomed to praying on a regular basis. Whenever you're feeling stressed, whenever you're feeling tempted, whenever you're feeling angry take a moment, go to a quiet place, take a deep breath, and pray the Lord's Prayer. It is a simple tool, but a powerful one. For James says, **“The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.”**

Now whether or not you actually get down on your knees to pray is not the main point (although if you're able to, it might not be a bad idea to do every once in a while), it's the attitude reflected when we pray. Some may do their best fighting on their feet (we might be tempted to think that too), but **CHRISTIANS FIGHT BEST ON THEIR KNEES.** It is a reminder of who's in control, and it's a reminder of who we love. Amen.