**Prayer** April 3, 2016

Prayer that Changes God’s Heart - Hezekiah

In Malachi 3:6 God said: *I the Lord do not change.*

Hebrews 1:10-12 quotes from Psalm 102:25-27 which twice says of God:

 *…you remain...*

 *...you remain the same…*

In Hebrews 13:8 we are told this about Jesus:

 *[He] is the same yesterday, today and forever.*

As we head to our coffee/question time, please discuss with another person the following question: what do you think it is about God that doesn’t change?

**Feedback:**

Does the fact that God is changeless mean that his will is changeless and that we live in a world where everything has already been decided by God?

If someone were to answer, “Yes, everything has been pre-determined by God,”

then another question needs to be asked: what then is the point of prayer?

Origen, a believer who lived in the 2nd century, wrote: *If everything happens according to God’s will and if that will is fixed and none of the things [God] wills can be changed…then prayer is in vain.* Was he right?

Now, just to make things really interesting, let’s factor in what God says about himself in Hosea 11.

*My heart is changed within me; all my compassion is aroused.*

How we think of God’s person and activity makes all the difference in how we relate to God. And how we relate to God makes all the difference in our practice of prayer, and any activity we would undertake for God in this world.

Andrew Murray, as he reflected on God’s person and how God allows himself to be influenced by our prayers, wrote:

 *Prayer is the power by which [things] comes to pass*

 *which otherwise would not take place.*

I want us today to consider a situation that involved one of the Old Testament kings named Hezekiah.

**2 Kings 18:3, 5-7a**

**2 Chronicles 31:20-21.**

When Hezekiah was approximately 40 years of age, he became ill and almost died. **Isaiah 38:1-8**.

What did Hezekiah do when he was told he would die?

He prayed: *Remember me O Lord.*

If everything is predetermined, why wouldn’t Hezekiah have said to God,

*“Your will be done?”*

What had Hezekiah come to know about God from walking with God?

He knew that with an unchanging God prayer makes a difference.

God lets us engage with him in prayer for his glory and for our growth in grace.

God answered Hezekiah’s prayer quickly.

Look at **2 Kings 20:4-5.**

God is a God of compassion.

He said to Hezekiah: *“I have heard your prayer and seen your tears…”*

The things that happen to God’s people touch his heart.

You and I need to reflect on this often - we matter to God.

In this situation involving Hezekiah, and in response to Hezekiah’s prayer,

God changed his heart. **2 Kings 20:5b-6.**

Something similar happened to the people of Ninevah.

**Jonah 3:1-4.**

What did the people of Ninevah do when they heard Jonah’s message?

**Jonah 3:5-9.**

When God saw: that the people of Ninevah believed him (v.5); and,

 that the people of Ninevah urgently called on him (v.8); and,

 that the people of Ninevah turned away from their sin (v.8);

what did God do?

Look at **Jonah 3:10.**

**The prayer of repentance touches and moves God’s heart.**

Look at **Jonah 4:1-2.**

As unbelievable as it sounds, when God changed his heart about Ninevah, Jonah complained about God... to God, and said that his original reason for attempting to run away, was because he knew... this is what God would do.

It upset Jonah that God was gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love. It angered Jonah that God allowed the prayers and acts of repentance of his enemies, the Ninevites, to change God’s heart regarding the calamity that was supposed to fall upon them.

I quote again from Andrew Murray:

 *God…allows himself to be [influenced] by prayer to do what he otherwise would not have done.* With Christ, p.127.

Here’s what the story of Hezekiah doesn’t teach.

God is not like a parent at the supermarket with a child who is whining because they’ve been told they can’t have a treat from the rows of chocolate bars.

You’ve seen it before, haven’t you?

***Please dad; please; please can I have this?***

No you can’t.

***But dad, I’m hungry. Please I need this. Please, please. Dad. Please.***

Please don’t keep asking. My answer is no.

***Dad. Sniffle. Tears. Dad, I really am hungry. Please, please. Please.***

I told you no, and I mean no. Now no more.

After this goes on…more pleading, more threats, more pleading, more threats, sometime the parent gives in and gives the child what they want.

The parable told by Jesus in **Luke 18:2-5**.

Jesus was not saying that if we ask long enough, often enough, hard enough… God will give in and give us what we want.

Jesus clearly explained the emphasis he wanted to make, when he started the story and when he finished it. **Luke 18:1, 6-8a**.

***Always pray and never give up because...God hears and will act quickly.***

Does God in every situation respond quickly? No.

But the fact that he doesn’t is not meant to diminish or negate the truth of

Isaiah 38 that it is a characteristic of God... to respond quickly to the prayers of his own.

Theologian Karl Barth said this about God’s unchanging nature and how he responds to our prayers:

*God is not deaf, he listens; more than that, he acts… Prayer exerts an influence upon God’s action…that is what the word ‘answer’ means.*

*The fact that God yields to man’s petitions, changing his intentions*

*in response to man’s prayer, is not a sign of weakness. [God] himself,*

 *in the glory of his majesty and power, has so willed it.* Prayer, p.21.

Philip Yancey in his book on prayer, grappled with the question of how our prayers influence a changeless God. He said:

*God waits to be asked, and in some inscrutable way makes his activity on earth contingent on us. Does God’s kingdom on earth advance more slowly because of that choice? Yes, in the same way parents slow their pace when the youngest child is learning to walk. Their goal [in doing so] is to equip*

*someone else, not themselves.* Prayer, p.144

As far as the reason as to why God sometimes waits or delays or answers differently... that will need to be the focus of another teaching time.

Back to Hezekiah. Why did God respond to his prayer so quickly?

I think we find the answer in the question asked by Jesus at the end of his parable in **Luke 18:8b**: *When the Son of Man comes; will he find faith on the earth?*

God answers our prayers not because we pray long... or pray right... or wear him down by nagging. **Prayer that moves the heart and the hand of God is prayer that is spoken in faith.**

**Consider what had just happened in Hezekiah’s life.**

When King Sennacherib of Assyria invaded Judah, Hezekiah told his people:

*Do not be afraid or discouraged because of the king of Assyria*

*and the vast army with him, for there is a greater power with us*

*than with him. With him is only the arm of flesh, but with us*

*is the Lord our God to help us and to fight our battles.* 2 Chr. 32:7-8.

When King Sennacherib arrogantly defied God and spoke of the Lord as being like the gods of the other peoples of the world – gods that were the work of men’s hands – King Hezekiah and the prophet Isaiah *“cried out in prayer to heaven about this.”* 2 Chr. 32:20.

God quickly answered their prayer and sent an angel who *“annihilated all the fighting men and the commanders and officers in the camp of the Assyrian king. So he [Sennacherib] withdrew to his own land in disgrace.”* 2 Chr. 32:21.

As a young king, Hezekiah had learned to pray in faith to God.

Hezekiah had learned that because God is good and compassionate, he always answers the prayers of his people.

Because God’s person does not change, what was true for Hezekiah is still true for us. It is by faith… in God… that we pray… to God.

And it is according to God’s goodness and compassion that he answers us.

I cannot fully explain how nor why a changeless God would choose to allow his people to influence him. All I can say is that he does.

It’s this knowledge of God’s person that changes our prayers to him from an act of drudgery into an incredible privilege.



So let’s speak with God quietly in our own hearts.

But before you ask anything of him,

\* thank him that he hears;

\* thank him that he is compassionate and good; and slow to anger

\* acknowledge that he is the God who responds when his people call out to him.

Now ask of him for what you need.

When we pray it is important that we remember who God is.

It is also important that we remember who we are - his children.

Let’s sing together the song which is actually a prayer: **Remind Who I Am**

**Matthew 18:19**

Is this not incredible????!!!!!!

God the Father responds to our collective prayers.

And when, we in agreement, pray together, there is an unseen person who is with us – **Matthew 18:20**.

Let’s gather now in **prayer huddles** and in faith speak with God on behalf of others – friends, family who need Jesus’ intervention and help.

**God hear us when we pray in faith;**

**and Hezekiah’s example assures us that our prayers to God make a difference!!!**

Read 1 Corinthians 11:23-26

Passing of the Bread

Song: You are Everything

Prayer of Thanks

Benevolent Offering

Song: Lay me Down

**The Blessing**

**Matthew 18:18**

Jesus promises:

 *“Whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven.”*

 *“Whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.”*

We live no ordinary lives.

Incredible privilege and blessing has been given to us by Jesus.

Our prayers, spoken to him in faith of him, impact life here on earth,

as well as life in heaven.