

**Pray! (With Confidence That
Great Things Will Happen)
Sermon on Romans 8:31-34
Saint Mark's, Watertown, WI
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Jesus Christ himself invites us: *Ask, and it will be given you! Seek, and you will find! Knock, and the door will be opened to you!* So, let's be sure to pray! Amen.

God's Word to us during this third week of a six-week sermon series on prayer is Romans, chapter eight, verses thirty-one through thirty-four:

What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all-- how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?

Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died-- more than that, who was raised to life-- is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.

This is the Word of the Lord.

Introduction: How's Your Prayer Life?

Dear fellow Christians—whom God earnestly enjoins to pray:

How's your prayer life?

It's a good question, isn't it? You know, Martin Luther used to call prayer a Christian's vital breath. I suppose that would mean that without prayer a Christian is basically dead. So, how is your prayer life personally?

Well, I'm guessing some of us would immediately and readily admit, "My prayer life is not what it should be." On the other hand, I know many of you have developed the habit of praying regularly. You'd say, "Oh, Pastor, I'm always praying." And that's great!

But I'll bet that even the greatest prayer warriors among us could stand some improvement in their prayer life. I mean: Do you always submit in prayer to God everything that you should? Do you always pray about the really big stuff, and not just the small stuff that's obvious in your own life? Do you always pray, for example, with the eternal souls of others in mind?

None of us can say we do that perfectly. Most of us must admit that our prayer life is very much imperfect. And I wonder why that is. You might respond, "Well, Pastor, I just don't know how to pray well"—which, of course, is why the dear Lord is addressing us on prayer. Or you might respond, "Pastor, I just don't seem to have time to pray"—and admittedly, that is a challenge.

But I suppose that, if we're willing to search our sinful hearts and actually admit our wicked weakness, we might eventually confess, "I'm just not as convinced as I should be that prayer does a lot of good."

Theme: Pray! (With Confidence that Great Things Will Happen)

And that's why God's Word to us today is such a treasure. It urges us to PRAY! (WITH CONFIDENCE THAT GREAT THINGS WILL HAPPEN). And this Word from God gives us a couple great reasons to pray. First of all, PRAY! (1) BECAUSE GOD GAVE HIS SON FOR YOU. He loves you! and he will benefit you in prayer. Secondly,

PRAY! (2) BECAUSE JESUS INTERCEDES FOR YOU. He's powerful! and he will help you in prayer.

Part One: Pray! because God Gave His Son for You

God's inspired Scripture for our consideration today comes from the Apostle Paul's Epistle to the Romans. As Paul writes it, he's on his Third Missionary Journey. He's in Corinth, Greece. And he's writing on ahead to the Christians in Rome, Italy. It's about the year fifty-five AD.

In the first eight chapters of Romans, Paul has laid out our utter sinfulness, our Savior's spectacular mercy, which has rescued us from our sinfulness, and he has also laid out the certainty of our salvation. Now Paul says, and this is our sermon text: *What, then, shall we say in response to this?*—to this breathtaking mercy of Christ. *If God is for us, who can be against us?*—if God is for us, even if everything else in the universe stands against us, we will prevail!

But how sure can we be that *God is for us*? Well, listen to this: *He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all-- how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?*

So, how surely is God for us? How surely is he “on our side” and we “on his side”? *God did not spare his own Son, but gave him up*—literally, it says here: He betrayed him – *He betrayed him for us all*.

Isn't that amazing?! I mean think of it.... You who are parents: Think of your relationship to your children. You who aren't parents: Think of your parents' relationship to you—or imagine if you did have children.... You love your kids! There's nothing you wouldn't do for your kids! I have said, “You'd have to kill me ten times over before you could harm even one hair on the head of any one of my precious children.” And I am only half kidding. And all of you feel the same way.

Now, God's relationship to his Son Jesus Christ is infinitely greater than our relationship to our children. After all, Jesus was perfectly innocent, perfectly obedient, perfectly pleasing to his Father. And yet, God's love for you is so great: that he declared his own innocent Son guilty ...for you! God's love for you is so great: that he put his own obedient Son through hell ...for you! God's love for you is so great: that he killed his Son, with whom he had been perfectly pleased ...in your place and in mine to save us!

This is breathtaking compassion! This is unfathomable mercy! This is incomprehensible love! And it proves: There's nothing God won't do for you!!!

So, when you're suffering pain: Pray! God WILL take it away. Or: God WILL strengthen you to stand up under it—a better person, to glorify him. And: God WILL deliver you from pain, eternally in glory.

Or, when you're suffering heartache, when it crushes you even to the point of tears, for a relationship gone tragically bad: Pray! God WILL heal the rift. Or: God WILL transform you into a more loving, forgiving person—better to glorify him. And: God WILL heal your every relationship in paradise.

Or, when you just can't seem to draw close to God: Pray! God WILL draw close to you. God WILL strengthen you to study his Scriptures. And: God WILL draw you close to his heart forever in heaven—through Jesus Christ.

Part Two: Pray! because Jesus Intercedes for You

So: Pray! because God gave his Son for you. He loves you enough to benefit you! Pray! also because.... Well, let's continue with God's Word: *Who will bring any*

charge against those whom God has chosen? So, suddenly, the scene now changes to a court of law. And we're on trial. And if we're on trial, and if we're guilty, then it throws into doubt all God's love for us—since God cannot love sin, nor the perpetrators of it.

Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? Oh, and that's referring to us. Not only does the previous context prove it, but Paul wrote elsewhere: *God chose US in Christ before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight.* US means us. That's Paul. That's you. That's me. That's Paul and God speaking to everybody who reads these words and genuinely believes them. We are those whom God has chosen.

So, once again: ***Who will bring any charge against US whom God has chosen?*** And the answer, emphatically, is: No one!—because ***It is God who justifies US.*** It is God who declares an innocent verdict upon us. That's what *justifies* means.

Same question again: ***Who is he that condemns?*** And if anyone succeeds in rightly condemning us, God can't love us—because he can't love wickedness, nor the perpetrators of it. But: ***Christ Jesus, who died-- more than that, who was raised to life-- is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.***

So, how surely does God pardon us? How surely does God listen to our plea for mercy? How effective are our prayers? ***Christ Jesus, who died-- more than that, who was raised to life-- is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.***

Imagine that! You and I trust Christ. You and I love God. But in our sinful wickedness, we're still going to sin. So, you and I cherish in our hearts our money or our pleasure more than we care for the Lord. Or you and I treat worship and God's Word as if they were a burden rather than abundantly a blessing. Or you and I mistreat another person, whether near to us or far from us. And Jesus winces. He hates that wickedness. But he's also interceding for us, like it says here. So, he turns to his Heavenly Father and says, "Father, it's true: they've sinned mightily. But you can't punish them. You've already punished me for us." And God agrees. And God's anger subsides. And God relents from executing us.

Isn't that wonderful?! Isn't that magnificent?! Isn't that comforting? And it proves: There's nothing Christ won't do for us!!!

So, when you see more and more of our citizens turn into murderers and perverts—aided and abetted by the laws of our land: Pray! God WILL improve things. Or: God WILL use this wickedness to execute his will. And: God WILL deliver you from wickedness forever in glory.

Or: when you watch the news, and see the ravages of terrorists across the globe, and fear that catastrophe will return to our shores: Pray! God WILL protect us. Or: God WILL use any catastrophe for the benefit of souls he has chosen and rescued through Jesus Christ. And: God WILL protect you from such tragedy eternally in paradise.

And: if you get concerned that Christ's Church can no longer impact people for the good in today's world: Pray! God WILL strengthen his Church. God WILL extend his Church. And God WILL deliver his Church through Jesus Christ.

Conclusion: Consider What Great Things Have Happened through Prayer!

So, how's your prayer life? – Well, wherever it's at, you have lots of incentive for improvement. You can pray with confidence that great things will happen. God gave his Son for you! He loves you enough to benefit you in prayer. Jesus intercedes for you! He's powerful enough to benefit you in prayer.

And finally, consider what great blessings your prayers have already brought....

I mean, for example: How is it that terrorists haven't managed to attack our shores for the past several years? How is it that, nationally, the crime rate has steadily gone down, not up, during the past decade and a half? How is it that we can still freely proclaim all of what Christ says in his Word? – God has graciously blessed our prayers!

How is it that our church body still holds to the truths of Christ's Word? How is it that our little church body maintains missions in twenty countries of the world? How is it that we have a worker-training system that is still second to none? – God has graciously blessed our prayers!

And: How is it that hundreds upon hundreds upon hundreds of us still gather, week by week, to listen to Christ's good news? How is it that no one on earth gets a better education in the Word of the Lord than our children? How is it that more dear souls keep joining our flock, and more dear souls keep returning to our flock? – God has graciously blessed our prayers!

The message is clear: Keep on praying! Jesus is listening—and answering! Amen.

Christ himself promises us: *Whatever you ask for in prayer—believing, you shall receive!* So, let's be sure to pray! Amen.