

# Ye Have Not Because Ye Ask Not

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In the book of James, James, chapter 4, the latter sentence, Ye have not because ye ask not. That's the negative. And then over against that, the very fine positive statement in chapter 5, last sentence, in verse 16, The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.

Now I think that most of you know that I do not make too much out of holidays or anniversaries. I nod to them and blow them a kiss and pass on to something that lasts. Holidays have a way of passing. But I cannot escape the knowledge that in this Christian era, we have arrived at the, or very within hours of 1957 that we shall call the New Year. And I am not going to go over the past.

We have a way here of keeping reviewed up and keeping our self-examination current, so that I am not going to examine the past, because that's been pretty well done, but I'm going to talk about the future. And in these texts which I have read, we have a word from the Holy Ghost.

Now, it is to our everlasting profit that we listen to this Word with meekness and with faith and obedience. When man speaks, just man, no matter who the man is, whether he be a king on a throne, or a scientist in his laboratory, or a philosopher in his study, when man speaks, we have a moral duty to question. We have a duty to doubt and examine.

But when God speaks, we dare not question, and there is no need to examine, and it is a sin to doubt. But we Christians, being yet somewhat in the world and having our old natures, tend sometimes to dull the edge of the Lord's Sword and avoid the point of the Lord's Word by what we call interpreting. If a text is too much for us, we interpret it, which means usually not that we're trying to find out what it says, but that we're trying to find out how we can get out of it.

But here is no place for interpretation whatever. There are two sentences, Ye have not because ye ask not. And the other one, the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much. Now only exhortation is needed here, not interpretation, and certainly not question or doubt.

Now the Holy Ghost says here that some Christians are self-made paupers. Ye have not because. Some Christians suffer from self-imposed poverty. I have often thought in a half-humorous way, if we lived in the same kind of homes, or if we lived in homes commensurate with our spiritual state, we'd be living in the slums, most of us. And if we dress commensurate with our inner spiritual condition, we'd be taken off the street for vagrancy. Because too many of us are self-imposed paupers.

Now this is not a misfortune to call up sympathy, this is a sin to call for repentance. Ye have not because? Ye have not because you don't know where to go. Every Christian should know where to go to ease his poverty and become rich. Ye have not because ye

know not who to ask? Every Christian should know whom to ask. And ye have not because ye know not how to obtain? If we know not how to obtain, one half hour of the Bible will teach us. No, ye have not because ye ask not. Ye live in poverty even though you know you do not believe, and so you do not ask effectively.

Now this poverty of ours, which can be shrugged off as long as we're in reasonably good health and have an income, and there's no war, this poverty of ours brings loss beyond description. It is not only what we get into, but what we don't get that's tragic in the Christian life. In our hearts, in our homes, in our labors, in our churches and assemblies where we meet together, to our friends and to the lost and to the world, we are allowing time to go by and days to succeed days and years to pile up on years. It doesn't seem like any time at all when I began my ministry here in Chicago over in the little old building, and I remember the first thing I said.

It sounds sort of piteously humorous now, although it certainly wasn't intended to be funny. I got up and I thought I'd make a nice approach to a nice congregation, and I said I was happy to be here and to speak to you people, but I said possibly some people may take me rather lightly because of my youth. But I said if youth is a crime, it is a crime everybody has been guilty of sometime, and if you will give me a little time, I'll atone for it. No prophecy was ever more fulfilled than that one has been.

But all down these years, I wonder how much we have lost that we could have had and how much that we didn't get that was rightfully ours under the terms of atonement because we didn't ask. Or if we asked, we didn't ask effectively.

Now there is much unbelief about prayer, even secret unbelief among people who pray. There's probably nothing in the whole field of religion about which there's more hypocrisy than about prayer, and yet I feel I want to modify that rather harsh word. Hypocrisy because I do not think it's deliberate, I don't think it's intentional at all, and it even springs from a rather high motive.

This unrealism is a better word, I think, a truer word. I don't avoid the other one because I'm afraid of it or afraid of you, but only because I think unrealism is better. So, I'll say that there probably is nothing in the whole field of religion about which there's more unrealism than there is in prayer.

And this is because I think no one wants to grieve God or injure other people by admitting their doubt concerning prayer, even if they have secret doubts concerning it, they don't want to admit them, because as David said when he was going through the dark valley of doubt, he said, if I speak thus, I offend against the generation of thy children. So, he kept his mouth shut until he got light on the problem. And I think that's the high and rather pure motive that helps most of us or that leads most of us to live in this never-never land of prayer that doesn't get answered. We don't want to grieve God or admit to our own hearts or certainly to injure others by admitting doubt concerning prayer. So, we go on secretly having our doubts, even doubting our own testimony.

Now, this arises from several causes. The doubts people have about prayer arise from several causes. I'm not going to name sin because we take that for granted, but I think

some people are benumbed a bit about prayer, hearing thousands of prayers made that are plainly not answered.

Now I like to be realistic up on a Christian level, and I'll tell you what I'd do this morning if God were to enable me. I'm no Pope, nor am I anything but a simple preacher of the gospel, but if I had any authority to make any bargains with the Almighty, I would settle with God for 10%.

I would say, God, if you will, oh, I'll do better than that. I will say, God, will you please answer 1% of the prayers that are made in the pulpits today, this Lord's Day, the last of 1956. Just answer 1% of them, Lord, and shrug off the other 99. Do you know what would happen? There would be a revival that would change the texture of Chicago society from the top to the bottom or the bottom to the top, if just 1 out of 100 prayers were answered in the pulpits these days. But people don't expect them to be answered, and so we go on piling them up, words, words, words. And we hear thousands of prayers made that are plainly not answered, and the result is, without wanting it, there comes a numbing of our faith and expectation, and then there is a nibbling at prayer with no success that most people do.

A nibbling at it. We nibble at prayer in the morning and at table and at night, and on certain stated occasions. If they're going to have a potato race, they want the pastor to be there to start it off with the prayer. And he asks for enough to bring revival to the whole wide world, just there under the tree. But nothing happens, we just nibble at it.

And then the misuse or the wrong use of prayer is also one other reason. We hear prayer used to get our own way and to crowd out a business rival and help us win the track race and all sorts of things. And everybody in his right mind knows God isn't going to answer prayers like that, but we smile sentimentally and say that God answered my prayer. The fellow that's lying on his back looking unseeing at the roof of the stadium, God didn't answer his prayer, but the fellow who has his hand raised high in the air, he had his prayer answered.

Now everybody knows, that has the brains he come into the world with, that God had nothing to do with either one of them. So, we simply say to ourselves, well, don't let's be cynics, don't let's be like Tozer about this, let's believe in it anyhow and get along somehow. And then another reason, another cause of doubt in prayer is seeing things attributed to prayer that prayer never caused. We have a way of doing that, but we'll pass that by.

So, Christians blandly overlook their own failure in prayer. Ye have not because ye ask not, and ye ask not because ye doubt, and ye doubt because you have seen prayers that were not answered and have known praying people that were always in trouble. And a lot of your own nibblings never got you anything, and so you throw the whole thing overboard and say it is a fine, noble thing that nobody can attain to.

Now ye have not because ye ask not, and we're self-imposed paupers, and the kindest thing I could ask God for today is that you, my dear people before me, should not suddenly have your external garments made to look like your internal life. I would be ashamed, and you would be ashamed, and the old torn jeans that I'd be dressed in and

the old battered stained shirt you'd have on, we'd feel pretty bad if we were as poverty-stricken in our wardrobe as we are in our hearts.

But here the Holy Ghost says over against this, The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much. Now that's not to be interpreted in the light of the things that I have mentioned here, prayers that haven't been answered and the unrealism in the field of prayer. This is to be believed, not interpreted.

The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much. I'm not sure that the man James could have got by on that sentence in the average schoolroom. They'd have said that he was tautological. Now tautological, in case you've forgotten your old definitions, means to say it twice, like saying a widow woman. Of course, she'd be a woman if she were a widow. That's tautology, that's saying it twice unnecessarily.

And I'm not sure that what James might be accused here of being a bit wordy by some when he said the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much because he could have turned it around and said the availing prayer of a righteous man is effectual. And it would have meant exactly the same thing. But the Holy Ghost was trying to get at us through the Apostle James and he was using such language as we have, not as he has, but as we have. So, he tells us in almost extravagant terms that prayer is effectual if it is fervent, and that it avails, and then God says, much.

Now the words, of course, are relative and they've got to be understood in their right context, and you've got to notice who uses them. If I were to say I heard a man, I often listen on the air to interviews, particularly when notable men are being interviewed in any field at all, I like to do that. I have an FM radio now and when I'm resting, I listen to these interviews in order to get a little education as I go along. And I heard a man some time ago and he was talking about something, what it was going to cost. Well, he said about six million dollars. You had to know who that man was in order to get your meaning.

If you're going to put anything into it, I'm going to invest heavily, he might have said. Well, that for me would be fifty cents. But for that man it was six million dollars, if I recall. And you hear that often, they'll say, well, we expect an income of about nine hundred thousand dollars this year, a little short of a million. Brethren, who was talking? Well, it depends altogether on who says much. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much, said the Holy Ghost.

Why, it would have been enough for the Holy Ghost to say little. For when God talks, God talks in cosmic terms. The God who says little or some or a small amount or a limited amount or much or many, that God holds the universe in His hands and the galaxies, and the far distant stars are His playthings. And everything that is belongs to Him. All matter, all mind, all life is His. And when God uses the word much, you and I ought to sit up and listen because we're up in the six million class.

We're listening to one talk who is infinitely rich beyond all description. And He says, you're poor and you're poverty stricken and your bones show through. That at your own fault. You're not asking for.

Don't forget that the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man leads God to move in your direction and the result will be much. And when God says much, he battles the imagination. I say I'd settle for the word little there.

If God were to use the word little. If I used the word much, it would mean a few hundred dollars. But when the government uses the word little, they mean two or three million or maybe a billion. It's got so they're ashamed to use common thousands anymore in Washington. Nobody would be caught saying thousand around there. They'd feel ashamed. They only talk in terms of millions and billions.

And that's the way God is. God has everything. And under the proper conditions, prayer is Earth's mightiest force. There's no question about it. Wesley is often quoted for saying things he never said. But I understand that he said this, God does nothing but in answer to prayer. And certainly, he would be a man who had a right to make that statement. God does nothing but in answer to prayer.

Meaning, I suppose, that before there were a need to pray, God out of His own heart moved to create His universe. But that now He has so geared the human race to prayer that God will not move but in answer to prayer. And our Lord Jesus Christ said, nothing shall be impossible unto you.

To whom was he speaking there? Nothing shall be impossible unto you, an angel?, as Milton painted, that when he lay down, lay across several hills. And that when he spread his wings, they went across vast landscapes. That kind of being, no. He was talking to people, even fallen people. Look at him there, he had just been born. And there his little red face. And they can't figure out whether it's human, but you had a human mother, so they figure it is. And they brand him and band him and take a footprint. And there he lies, all miserable looking. Can't raise his head, can't raise his hands or feet yet. And sleeps curled up the way he's been for the last while. And there he is, so weak that he'd lie right there and die. If a lot of old nurses and people didn't help him.

And God says to that kind of creature, nothing shall be impossible unto you. You say he grows, sure, see him a year later. Now with shiny eyes he's learned to walk. And take a few steps over the smooth floor. Can't make it if it's rough, but he takes a few experimental steps on a smooth floor. And balances himself like a skier by holding his hands up. And there he is now. Push him and he's gone. Weak little one year old. And the Lord's voice is sounding, nothing shall be impossible unto you.

You say wait till he grows up, sure. Wait till he grows up. Here he is driving behind a car with so much out in front that he can't possibly see who he hits. So, he drives on in a great big hunk of metal with roaring motors that makes up psychologically for the weakness he feels inside of himself. And when he steps down on the accelerator, the immediate response somehow gets into his system, and he feels that's his response. I am an American. I live in the 20th century. I live in the period when we've conquered nature, he says.

And then an invisible substance from somewhere, so small that only the laboratory can discover it, a little thing they call a virus gets into him and he doesn't even know where he got it. He doesn't know where he breathed it in or if it was on the edge of a glass

when he drank water. He doesn't know what friend might have said good morning and breathed it on him. He doesn't know. But all he knows is he says to his wife, I don't feel good somehow. My head's low and I'm aching. Pretty soon he's down on his back, pale white, and so weak he has to be lifted up.

And two or three doctors and a nurse have to try desperately to keep him from dying. And a little invisible thing, so small and weak, that we'd pass it over without noticing it, has done that to that great big he-boy. With his big chest and his muscles, now he lies there whimpering, and his wife sits and puts cold cloths on his noble brow. But the poor fellow, we'll hope he gets well. I'm just creating one out of whole cloth for the occasion. I haven't anybody in mind. But I hope he gets well.

But anyway, there he is, and the Holy Ghost is saying to him, nothing shall be impossible unto you. See him a few years from now. See him when his chin meets his nose at night. But in the daytime, he's quite normal looking, except that he is badly shrunk, and his voice has gone piping. And this strong fellow, now see him limp with the help of a cane down the steps to meet his grandchildren.

There he is, there's that fellow to whom God said, nothing shall be impossible unto you. Was God playing with him? Was God simply being humorous? Must this be interpreted and understood somehow poetically or metaphorically? No. When the Lord said, Nothing shall be impossible unto you, write across the page in your Bible, you have the interpretation.

Here it is, because nothing is impossible with God. There's why God can say to that little thing, red-faced and squally there in the bassinet, nothing need be impossible to you. That's why God can say to the man lying in his bed, nothing need be impossible to you, because nothing is impossible to Me.

And so God invites us to omnipotence. He invites us to share his muscles and to have His riches and to live in His strength. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much. If we would set ourselves to prayer, my friends, this year, habits could be broken that have cursed and blasted some of us for years. Temptations could be defeated that we've stumbled over for decades. Circumstances that have hindered us could be radically altered, for nothing shall be impossible.

And some of Satan's captives that are now bound could be set free. And the wanderers could be restored and hard sinners could be converted and minds could be changed completely, and hearts cleansed and filled with the Holy Ghost. If we only dared to believe what our Lord said through the Apostle James, the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much. Now, let's face up to it. Ye have not.

Now, let's not excuse ourselves. That's the cheapest and easiest way out, but it's also the way to deeper poverty. And let us not pity ourselves. Self-pity never helped anybody yet. So let us not say, ye have not, and then begin to sniffle. Ye have not, because ye ask not. Now, God can't remedy this by himself. You and I are going to have to remedy it by remembering and putting into effect these other passages that nothing shall be impossible unto you.

My brethren, we have had two critical years in this Church, two critical years. I don't know whether it's the kind discipline of the Holy Ghost, or whether what it is, I'm not sure, I don't know. But I do know this, that in this Church, more than any other that I've ever heard of, except in an Army camp, our personnel changes over. Just when we get going nicely, there's a blow-up, and I don't mean trouble, I mean that there will be as many as 8, 10, 12 families moved to parts unknown.

If I could have my congregation together once, brother, we'd have to rent a stadium. But they go, they go. They go to preach, they go to the field, they go marry somebody and become a preacher's wife, or they move to California or Florida or Wisconsin or Michigan or Nebraska, Nebraska, or New Jersey, and we'll lose them.

And just this last year we have had 50 of our regular people who would have been here this morning have gone and left us. And it looks as if our business was to sort of set people on fire and then say goodbye to them, sadly, and watch them go. And the only hope I have is that wherever they go, they'll spread the fire.

But you know, although we have had some pretty heavy sledding, numerically, we haven't had any heavy sledding financially. In 1955 we were third highest in missionary giving in a thousand churches in the United States and Canada. And I'm happy to tell you that for 1955 we had steadily along the largest prayer meetings that we have ever known in the years that I've been here.

Now, my friends, I want to insist in closing that prayer, the right kind of prayer, persistent prayer, sets up an irresistible pressure that nature won't hold, that circumstances won't hold, that it sets up an internal pressure. It'll break through somewhere. Somehow, it'll break through. Maybe not in the direction you face, but the effectual prayer of a man who's righteous, that is, living right in the will of God, that prayer sets up an increasing pressure. And it's going to explode, it's going to blow, it's going to get through somewhere. And I don't know where always.

But I want to prophesy a little this morning. A man is quite a fool who'll prophesy, but I am willing to be a fool for Christ's sake and say this to you, that in the religious world, that is, in the evangelical religious world, for the Roman Catholic side of the Church, Christendom, and for the liberal side, I have nothing to say. To them I have nothing to say now.

I'm thinking about the evangelicals, the fundamentalists, the Bible people, the full gospel people. I want to tell you something which may happen within this year or within a few, very few years to come. There's going to be a realignment of spiritual forces.

We are being taught now that religion is coming into its own because there is increased tolerance. The ecumenical spirit that takes in everybody that says Jesus and that opens his Bible and goes to church once a Sunday, or twice a year even, that religion is on the increase and on the way up. Now, I don't believe that nor accept it for a moment.

I believe rather that evangelicalism is on its way out, but that as that woman stood—now, this is not the prophetic interpretation. It's meant to be an illustration. As that woman in the twelfth chapter of Revelation stood and gave birth to a son, and that son

immediately became the target for hell's bullets, and God had to snatch him away to save him.

So evangelicalism is going to hive off, and there's going to be a realignment of forces. Now you watch it, my brethren. There's going to be a realignment of forces when God finds a few bold, courageous men who aren't afraid of their paycheck and don't care who likes them and dare to pray and then stand up and tell them what God said. And there's going to be something new born out of this dying thing. And it will not be born around banquet tables. It will not be born around panel discussion tables.

It will not be born in any other way but in the way the man-child was in Revelation 12, the old-fashioned way. I hope I'm still going strong, if you would allow that last word to stand unchallenged, in the day when this realignment takes place. Some of us are going to be asked to stand up and be counted one of these times, whether we are going to follow the New Testament methods and morals and ways and techniques, or whether we're going to claim evangelical doctrine and then invent our own idols and follow them.

The Holy Ghost will yet triumph, brethren, and I trust it may be in 1957. And I am telling you that if you will give yourself to prayer this year, if you will make prayer your career, and then not watch for little answers here and there, not pray that Peggy might pass her tests and then say, oh, say, God, you didn't hear my prayer because Peggy got an X. Not that kind of praying, brethren. Not that kind of praying. That kind of praying is the cheap little grocery list praying. I want a package of pep and two bushels of eggs and a quart of milk and send a bill to Dad. Not that. That's cheap praying.

But there's another kind of praying, a praying in the Holy Ghost, a yearning that sometimes seems to have no object toward which it's moving, but a yearning in the Holy Ghost. If you will give yourself to that kind of praying, there will be a pressure built up, and it will break over somewhere, not in the direction that we think, but in God's direction at last, and the Holy Ghost will triumph. I believe He will triumph. I am not pessimistic. I believe He will triumph.

And this prayer pressure. And what do I mean by prayer pressure? Oh, really, brethren, I'm only using figures of speech because prayer in itself is nothing. Prayer is simply the means by which we bring God's power into human affairs. That's all. And it's the power of God in human affairs that I'm talking about. Prayer in itself has no power. It is the power of God that prayer brings into human affairs. And it's when God Almighty releases a little trickle of that mighty, mighty, flowing, vast, illimitable stream of energy into human affairs that the Spirit says, much!

So really it isn't the prayer, it isn't the length of time you pray, it isn't how many times you pray every day, it is praying effectively so as to release that power into our Church and into your life and into your home and into your labors and love and business. And if we'll only dare to believe this, we've been so poverty-stricken, so poverty-stricken.

You have not, because you have not asked. But if you'll ask, the effectual, fervent prayer of a righteous man will do wonders, and it will build up pressure that it will break over

into the work of God and the business of God, and we'll see a realignment of forces, and we'll see conversions that mean something, and we'll see transformations that last.

So, shall we not determine, by the grace of God, that 1957 isn't going to get by? You know what? It could easily be, and even probably will be, that I or Mr. McAfee, Brother Moore, or somebody else you've called in, may stand and talk in a low voice over the still form of some that now listen to me.

Time is wasting, judgment draws nigh, the Lord is coming, religion is festering at its root and rotting in its stems and branches. But there's life, there's life left yet, there's life there, the root of the matter is present. And if God can find his praying people, his intercessors, who aren't worried about little technical answers to prayer they can make a tract out of, but are ready to throw themselves out onto God like a traveling human and wrestle in the Holy Ghost with the powers of evil, until the pressure of the power of God is such that the forces of Satan are driven back and the pure thing is born, despised maybe and wondered at, but a pure thing will be born out of the writhing and prevailing of Christendom as we know it today.

I want to be, by the grace of God present, and I pray this church may be in on it. Ah, little Samuel, when God was going to do a terrible thing in Israel, called Samuel aside and whispered in Samuel's ear. He couldn't tell the old man, He had to tell the boy. And it came to pass just as God said it would. And that's on the judgment side, but I'm interested in the other side. And I pray that when God wants to do something, he'll tell me and I'll tell you, or you'll hear it and tell me.

And we'll know that God is moving again as in the days of yore, moving to convert and purify and separate and moving to draw a line of demarcation sharp as a razor blade and wide as the gulf that separated Dives and Lazarus, so the church may be realigned and God's ancient power may begin to flow again. And the muscle boys and the funny boys will take a back seat and watch the Holy Ghost do the work they futilely tried to do after the manner of man.

Shall we pray this year, brethren and sisters? Shall we call on God as we never have before? Maybe tonight we may have an altar service over this. I want to talk some more tonight. I want to preach tonight a sermon I preached eighteen years ago and got written into a booklet and I've been afraid to preach it ever since because I didn't want to repeat it.

But I feel I must tonight re-preach a sermon I preached nearly about eighteen years ago. And I want you present. And perhaps God will break in on us and we'll see him move to his own glory and our good.