

Answered Prayers

Several years back, country singer Garth Brooks topped the charts with his song, “Unanswered Prayers”. Singing of God’s care by NOT answering prayers, he spread an idea bringing a false sense of comfort to millions of struggling listeners. When faith is based upon pop culture rather than truth, grief will inevitably follow (Mat. 7:24-27). God’s word provides spiritual truth concerning prayer.

The fact is that God will not hear the prayers of impenitent sinners. Proverbs 28:9 says, “He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be abomination” (c.f. John 9:31, 1 Pet. 3:12). This is not a mark of God’s care, but a reflection of man’s condition (Rom. 3:23). Nor is it a comment upon God’s power. Long ago, Isaiah told the people of Israel, “Behold, the LORD’S hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear: But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear” (Isa. 59:1-2). God can “hear” the prayers of anyone, but He will not give ear to those who have gone astray, rather, they must seek Him in the way he has prescribed.

For the faithful child of God there are no “unanswered prayers”. Those who ask according to their own selfishness may protest, “I don’t get everything I want”. That is the heart of the problem for that individual, they ask according to their own selfish lusts (Jam. 4:3). However, it must be remembered that God is the one who answers prayers and for His faithful children they are all answered. God gives four basic answers to prayers.

God, a loving Father, sometimes says NO! That may be a surprise to many people, and perhaps this is the kind of thing others think about when considering the idea of “unanswered prayers.” Nonetheless, what we ask for may not be in our best interest which is why we pray, “Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven” (Mat. 6:10). Even Christ exemplified this attitude praying, “...nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done” (Luke 22:42). Sometimes, due to man’s misunderstanding or inability to know things NOT revealed, he may pray for something contrary to God’s will. God will say NO.

Other times God may say “yes” and grant the requests of His children. Even then, God may give what is asked, but not exactly in the way they were expected to be given. This is similar to Abraham, who after being told to offer Isaac went out to obey supposing God would

raise him from from the dead (Heb. 11:19). One thing is sure, that whatever God gives will still be Good. Jesus asked, "Or what man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone? Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent?" (Mat. 7:9-10). God's way is the better way.

There are many misconceptions about what God will give and how. Some are of no consequence, but others undermine God's own word and lead one to pray for things contrary to God's will. In the past God has done some things miraculously, but miracles have ceased (1 Cor. 13:10). Today God can use providence to answer the prayers of man. It is never a question of what God CAN do, but what He Will do. In the past God made man out of dust, but today He uses the natural birth process. Couples praying for children may have them, but they will not arise from the dust in the backyard. Christians pray for bread (Matt. 6:11). In the past He gave manna, but today man must work for the things he receives, but it is God that provides the seed, the ground, rain, opportunity according to the laws of His creation.

Perhaps the most difficult answer for God's children is when God says "wait". Christians need prayer, but also need patience to abide under whatever circumstances they face. Paul wrote, "Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus" (Phi. 4:6-7). He also went on to say, "...I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content."

For the faithful child of God, there are no "unanswered prayers". Rather than trying to see how God "meant" one's life to end up by looking at his life, he should turn to the Bible and compare his life for understanding (John 17:17; Jam. 1:25ff). In this is found God's care, "Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time: Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you." (1 Pet 5:7).