

The Problem of Unanswered Prayers

1 John 5:13-15

- 13 These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God.
- 14 And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us:
- 15 And if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him. KJV

One of the greatest blessings that we have as the people of God is the privilege of prayer and the promises associated with it.

We know that it is God's will for His people to seek Him in prayer when they find themselves in any distress, particularly spiritual difficulty.

Ps 27:7-8

- 7 Hear, O LORD, when I cry with my voice: have mercy also upon me, and answer me.
- 8 When thou saidst, Seek ye my face; my heart said unto thee, Thy face, LORD, will I seek.

The assurances and encouragements of the Lord Jesus Christ concerning prayer are enormous.

Matt 7:7-11

- 7 Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you:
- 8 For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.
- 9 Or what man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone?
- 10 Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent?
- 11 If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?

We must believe that our Father truly desires to give us good things and that He will as we ask Him.

Matt 21:21-22

- 21 Jesus answered and said unto them, Verily I say unto you, If ye have faith, and doubt not, ye shall not only do this which is done to the fig tree, but also if ye shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; it shall be done.
- 22 And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive.

John 14:12-13

- 12 Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do

- also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go unto my Father.
- 13 And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son.

We pray with the disciples, "Lord, increase our faith."

John 15:7

- 7 If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you.

We know that we need to learn more about abiding in Him.

John 16:22-27

- 22 And ye now therefore have sorrow: but I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you.
- 23 And in that day ye shall ask me nothing. Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you.
- 24 Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name: ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full.
- 25 These things have I spoken unto you in proverbs: but the time cometh, when I shall no more speak unto you in proverbs, but I shall shew you plainly of the Father.
- 26 At that day ye shall ask in my name: and I say not unto you, that I will pray the Father for you:
- 27 For the Father himself loveth you, because ye have loved me, and have believed that I came out from God.

1 John 3:22

- 22 And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight.

Introduction:

Today I want to explore something with you that is directly related to our topic. **Why do we pray things that are according to the will of God and have those prayers go unanswered?**

Now there are two things that I need for you to do. First, separate in your mind the two kinds of prayers that we pray.

1. One is those prayers that we know, from the Word of God, are consistent with His Will. These include prayers for the advancement of His Kingdom, the infilling of the saints with the Holy Spirit, repentance when we have sinned, wisdom when we are being foolish, and a restoration of the church when it has fallen away from Him.
2. The other are those things about which we are not certain: healing of illness, decisions about which there are no definite spiritual principles in play, and, more importantly, the salvation of people whom we love, or even people in general.

The second kind we are not going to deal with today and I really want you not to be confused. There are any number of reasons why those prayers might not be answered. We know that God is Sovereign and rules all things according to the Council of His Own Will. Don't confound the issues or you will never understand what I am trying to say. OK?

The other thing I want you to do to prepare your mind is to get ready to hear the Rough Voice of God. Many people do not believe that God speaks to His people with a rough voice but we saw this week in the messages (Convocation2018) that this is simply not true.

He warned either the preacher or the church at Ephesus (I still think it was the preacher) that He would come and take away the candlestick, the light of His Presence, maybe even His calling upon the man. And He warned the preacher or the church at Laodicea that He would spew him or them out of His mouth. Now those are not encouraging words. Those are not gentle words. In some sense they are not what we expect from the Lord.

And this was not the first time the Lord had used His Rough Voice. Remember what He said to the Pharisees and others on the streets of Jerusalem just days before His death?

Matt 23:13-19

- 13 But woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men: for ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in.
- 14 Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye devour widows' houses, and for a pretence make long prayer: therefore ye shall receive the greater damnation.
- 15 Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, ye make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves.
- 16 Woe unto you, ye blind guides, which say, Whosoever shall swear by the temple, it is nothing; but whosoever shall swear by the gold of the temple, he is a debtor!
- 17 Ye fools and blind: for whether is greater, the gold, or the temple that sanctifieth the gold?
- 18 And, Whosoever shall swear by the altar, it is nothing; but whosoever sweareth by the gift that is upon it, he is guilty.
- 19 Ye fools and blind: for whether is greater, the gift, or the altar that sanctifieth the gift? KJV

And, He had often used His Rough Voice through the prophets.

Isa 1:10-16

- 10 Hear the word of the LORD, ye rulers of Sodom; give ear unto the law of our God, ye people of Gomorrah.
- 11 To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the LORD: I am full of the burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts; and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he goats.

- 12 When ye come to appear before me, who hath required this at your hand, to tread my courts?
- 13 Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination unto me; the new moons and sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with; it is iniquity, even the solemn meeting.
- 14 Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hateth: they are a trouble unto me; I am weary to bear them.
- 15 And when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you: yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear: your hands are full of blood.
- 16 Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil; KJV

He was telling them that they were practicing evil deeds and that even their worship at the temple He rejected because of their wicked lives.

We could give many examples of this because this was the primary duty of the prophets, to carry the Rough and Difficult Message of God to the Jewish people.

God has such a voice and when His people are in spiritual decline they must prepare themselves to hear it. So.... I want you to make preparation in your mind because the things I am going to say today are not easy to hear.

Why does God not hear the prayers of His people when they ask things that are in accordance with His Will so far as scripture is concerned?

Are you ready?

James 4:3

- 3 Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts. KJV

I want to look first at the beginning of this statement, “Ye ask and receive not because ye ask amiss...”

Let me rephrase it a little but I think I am sustaining the meaning, “Ye ask and do not receive because there is something wrong with you.” **I said that it would be difficult to hear this message.**

What could possibly be wrong with a person who is praying and praying for the very blessings that God has revealed in His Word?

First of all, there can be hidden sin.

Remember the story of Achan? Israel had crossed the Jordan by a miracle and taken the impregnable city of Jericho by the power of God. They had been told not to take anything from the city but leave it all as an offering to God. And.... they all obeyed.... except for one guy.

The next city in their path was a very small and poorly defended (at least by comparison with Jericho) city of Ai. It was determined that only a part of the army would go and take the city, but do you remember what happened?

Josh 7:2-5

- 2 And Joshua sent men from Jericho to Ai, which is beside Beth-aven, on the east side of Bethel, and spake unto them, saying, Go up and view the country. And the men went up and viewed Ai.
- 3 And they returned to Joshua, and said unto him, Let not all the people go up; but let about two or three thousand men go up and smite Ai; and make not all the people to labour thither; for they are but few.
- 4 So there went up thither of the people about three thousand men: and they fled before the men of Ai.
- 5 And the men of Ai smote of them about thirty and six men: for they chased them from before the gate even unto Shebarim, and smote them in the going down: wherefore the hearts of the people melted, and became as water. KJV

Now, let me ask you, was it God's Will for Israel to take Ai? Did they go in faith, trusting God for the victory? What happened? **God spoke in His Rough Voice, causing them to lose 36 good men in a humiliating defeat?**

What was the problem? Well, God told Joshua.

Josh 7:7-12

- 7 And Joshua said, Alas, O Lord GOD, wherefore hast thou at all brought this people over Jordan, to deliver us into the hand of the Amorites, to destroy us? would to God we had been content, and dwelt on the other side Jordan!
- 8 O Lord, what shall I say, when Israel turneth their backs before their enemies!
- 9 For the Canaanites and all the inhabitants of the land shall hear of it, and shall environ us round, and cut off our name from the earth: and what wilt thou do unto thy great name?
- 10 And the LORD said unto Joshua, Get thee up; wherefore liest thou thus upon thy face?
- 11 Israel hath sinned, and they have also transgressed my covenant which I commanded them: for they have even taken of the accursed thing, and have also stolen, and dissembled also, and they have put it even among their own stuff.
- 12 Therefore the children of Israel could not stand before their enemies, but turned their backs before their enemies, because they were accursed: neither will I be with you any more, except ye destroy the accursed from among you. KJV

Hidden sin, even small hidden sins, can be the very thing which causes God to go silent to the prayers of His people even when they are seeking to do what He has commanded. The possession of the land was a promise of long standing which God had often renewed. Israel had been delivered from Egypt for the express purpose of taking and occupying that land. Ai had to be conquered for that to happen. But God would not tolerate His express commands being disobeyed.

The Rough Voice of God speaks to all of us and calls us out to make sure that there is no such sin in the camp.

These nine years, even though there have been blessings along the way, stand in very Loud Silence, speaking to us about something. From the preacher to the church member, we must examine ourselves to see if the fault somehow lies in sin that we hold onto and refuse to repent of.

Secondly, there can be polluted motives.

Notice the rest of the passage in James: “that ye may consume it upon your lusts.” Here is a reality that we often miss. **Good things can be done and sought for reasons that are mixed and not altogether pure.**

A preacher can seek for Revival and at the same time be hoping for something for himself in it. “If my church grows maybe I can get a bigger salary.” “If revival starts at my church maybe I will become a hero.” “If revival comes maybe I can experience some of those things I read about.” And there are a thousand other issues that might pollute our motives.

Moses once did a thing with mixed motives. Remember the second encounter with the Rock that provided water for Israel?

Num 20:8-12

- 8 Take the rod, and gather thou the assembly together, thou, and Aaron thy brother, and speak ye unto the rock before their eyes; and it shall give forth his water, and thou shalt bring forth to them water out of the rock: so thou shalt give the congregation and their beasts drink.
- 9 And Moses took the rod from before the LORD, as he commanded him.
- 10 And Moses and Aaron gathered the congregation together before the rock, and he said unto them, Hear now, ye rebels; must we fetch you water out of this rock?
- 11 And Moses lifted up his hand, and with his rod he smote the rock twice: and the water came out abundantly, and the congregation drank, and their beasts also.
- 12 And the LORD spake unto Moses and Aaron, Because ye believed me not, to sanctify me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore ye shall not bring this congregation into the land which I have given them. KJV

Did Moses fetch water from the rock for Israel? Yes, but the way he did it showed his anger, that his heart was not pure, that he was not in total submission to the Will of God in the matter. **And the Rough Voice of God spoke to him in discipline and deprived him of a great a wonderful blessing, which, we assume he would have enjoyed had he not done this thing with mixed motives.**

We are admonished to serve the Lord with a pure heart and we should expect some feedback from Him when we do not.

Ps 24:3-5

- 3 Who shall ascend into the hill of the LORD? or who shall stand in his holy place?
- 4 He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart; who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully.
- 5 He shall receive the blessing from the LORD, and righteousness from the God of his salvation. KJV

2 Tim 2:22

- 22 Flee also youthful lusts: but follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart. KJV

One can serve God and do good things with a heart that is polluted with mixed motives but such a one should expect to hear, in some fashion or another, the Rough Voice of God and should not be surprised to find God silent toward important prayers.

Thirdly, there can be issues of maturity that need resolution.

As difficult as it is for us to wrap our minds around the topic, there are some of the things of God that even those whom we might consider advanced in spiritual things are not ready to handle.

1 Cor 3:1-4

- 1 And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ.
- 2 I have fed you with milk, and not with meat: for hitherto ye were not able to bear it, neither yet now are ye able.
- 3 For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men?
- 4 For while one saith, I am of Paul; and another, I am of Apollos; are ye not carnal? KJV

Now, I know, our pride tells us that we are not those like those carnal Christians at Corinth. Oh, except for that little thing of division and controversy over things that will not matter in eternity. We are kinda like them about that, but that shouldn't keep our prayers from being answered, right?

In my mind the silence of Heaven toward our prayers for an Awakening scream at us in the Rough Voice of God that He will not bless a people who are given to division and fighting over things that have no eternal weight. **Can you hear the Rough Voice of God? I can certainly hear the silence!**

And, finally, there can be issues related to understanding of the whole context of the Will of God than need to be finalized.

Sometimes there are issues that God needs to work out in us concerning maturity. Sometimes, it may be, (and I really hope that this is the issue) that there are maturity issues, not necessarily sin, that must be worked out.

In a sense we can look around and ask, “who is sufficient for these things?”

I am pretty sure that this sort of thing was often involved in the delayed answers to David’s prayers. He reflected a maturity of waiting, allowing the Lord to work in His soul even as he agonized in prayers. But still God had him wait.

Ps 40:1-3

- 1 I waited patiently for the LORD; and he inclined unto me, and heard my cry.
- 2 He brought me up also out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings.
- 3 And he hath put a new song in my mouth, even praise unto our God: many shall see it, and fear, and shall trust in the LORD. KJV

He waited in a horrible pit crying out to God and was revived for it. The agony of the waiting must have been terrible, but he did not stop.

Ps 69:1-6

- 1 Save me, O God; for the waters are come in unto my soul.
- 2 I sink in deep mire, where there is no standing: I am come into deep waters, where the floods overflow me.
- 3 I am weary of my crying: my throat is dried: mine eyes fail while I wait for my God.
- 4 They that hate me without a cause are more than the hairs of mine head: they that would destroy me, being mine enemies wrongfully, are mighty: then I restored that which I took not away.
- 5 O God, thou knowest my foolishness; and my sins are not hid from thee.
- 6 Let not them that wait on thee, O Lord GOD of hosts, be ashamed for my sake: let not those that seek thee be confounded for my sake, O God of Israel. KJV

Here is a waiting in which David was experiencing agony and worrying that other believers, those who looked to him for leadership, might falter because of His. This enduring agony of waiting was a kind of a training and developing for him that God might use him the more effectively.

But still it was waiting without deliverance and in agony. We do not see it as anything but God developing the man to whom He was going to show Himself gracious.

Ps 130

- 1 Out of the depths have I cried unto thee, O LORD.
- 2 Lord, hear my voice: let thine ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications.
- 3 If thou, LORD, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?
- 4 But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared.
- 5 I wait for the LORD, my soul doth wait, and in his word do I hope.
- 6 My soul waiteth for the Lord more than they that watch for the morning: I say, more than they that watch for the morning.

- 7 Let Israel hope in the LORD: for with the LORD there is mercy, and with him is plenteous redemption.
- 8 And he shall redeem Israel from all his iniquities. KJV

Here again is a waiting while in a bad place that did not seem to be connected to discipline or chastening. **But the silence still sounds like rebuke, like the Rough Voice of God.**

The truth is that I do not completely know why God has refused to answer our prayers for Awakening.

However, I do know what my duties are:

- Make sure that there is no hidden or secret sin, that I have repented of them all,**
- Make sure that my heart is pure and without any hidden, polluted, or selfish motives as I seek His blessings upon our world,**
- Do my best to grow and do all within my power not to be spiritually immature or carnal, to avoid with a passion all unnecessary divisions with my brothers and sisters in Christ,**
- And, to be willing to actively, aggressively, persistently, militantly wait on God as He finishes whatever He needs to finish in me and in us that we might see an Awakening in Our Time.**

What about you?