

## “UN-ANSWERED PRAYER”

Rev. Becky Stephens

**Text: James 5:13-20 NLT**

**God's Word: Psalm 66:16-20 NLT**

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*<sup>13</sup> Are any of you suffering hardships? You should pray. Are any of you happy? You should sing praises.*

*<sup>14</sup> Are any of you sick? You should call for the elders of the church to come and pray over you, anointing you with oil in the name of the Lord. <sup>15</sup> Such a prayer offered in faith will heal the sick, and the Lord will make you well. And if you have committed any sins, you will be forgiven.*

*<sup>16</sup> Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The earnest prayer of a righteous person has great power and produces wonderful results. <sup>17</sup> Elijah was as human as we are, and yet when he prayed earnestly that no rain would fall, none fell for three and a half years! <sup>18</sup> Then, when he prayed again, the sky sent down rain and the earth began to yield its crops.*

*<sup>19</sup> My dear brothers and sisters, if someone among you wanders away from the truth and is brought back, <sup>20</sup> you can be sure that whoever brings the sinner back from wandering will save that person from death and bring about the forgiveness of many sins.*

I've heard a lot about answered prayer over the past few weeks. Some have thanked God that their loved one only had a mild case of COVID-19. One shared that they got a new job. One couple came to me and said by the grace of God, they are going to work on their marriage—answered prayer. One family has said that God answered their prayers by bringing their family together after many years of separation.

...but at the same time...Ever since I entered the ministry, I have heard many people say, “I don't think God answers my prayers.” ...or “I prayed for this and it didn't happen...therefore I am mad at God.”

Have any of you ever made a wish over a wishbone or a birthday cake with candles? I can remember, as a little kid--long before I was able to even think of driving, wishing that a red Corvette would magically appear out in our driveway. I dashed to the window, and...well...there was no Corvette...just my mom's blue LTD.

Well, I soon learned that wishing for something while you are holding the biggest piece of a wishbone does not work...neither does throwing pennies in a wishing well and making a wish...nor does wishing for something before blowing out all the candles on a birthday cake...even if you do keep your wish a secret. There is no such thing as a wishing well, and yet many of us are guilty of expecting God to act as one.

Suppose, I, at five or six years old were to pray to God that a red Corvette would suddenly appear in my parent's driveway...and it did!? Would God really be looking out for my best interests? Why should I get a red Corvette for nothing while my neighbors do not? How spoiled would I become if all I had to do when I saw something I liked and wanted was to pray and it would suddenly appear? I wouldn't have to work for anything. I wouldn't be grateful because I would come to expect anything and everything I

wanted whenever I wanted it. Would it make me happier? Would it make my life more fulfilling if God were to give to me everything that my flesh desires?

Well, at the very least, the answer is “No!” simply because much of what my flesh desires is not good for me...does not lead to my salvation, the salvation of others and the overall good of humankind.

Let's take a look at James chapter 4:1-3.

*What is causing the quarrels and fights among you? Don't they come from the evil desires at war within you? 2 You want what you don't have, so you scheme and kill to get it. You are jealous of what others have, but you can't get it, so you fight and wage war to take it away from them. Yet you don't have what you want because you don't ask God for it. 3 And even when you ask, you don't get it because your motives are all wrong—you want only what will give you pleasure.*

Hmmm...When we have prayed for something and we have not received it...were we asking for something with the wrong motives? Did we ask for something simply to gratify our lusts?

Let's look at Psalm 66:16-20 which Pastor Mike read this morning...

The Psalmist tells us that if he or she had cherished or clung to sin in his or her heart the Lord would not have listened and heard the Psalmist's voice in prayer. We're starting to see a pattern here are we not?

Sin obstructs prayer. Our own selfish desires obstruct prayer. Our God is the God of Love Who loves sacrificially. Selfishness or selfish motives are not in God's repertoire...God's will has to do with what is best for us...what will purify us...what will bring us closer to becoming the people God originally created us to be...and let's face it...we often do not pray for those things that will bring us into closer relationship with God.

God has a plan for our lives and that plan is a good plan. It is a plan for us to call on His name and be saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ...so that we can begin the Christian journey...and start the process of being changed more and more into the image of Christ.

And there is no greater plan in all the earth. There is no other plan that is filled with so much unselfish, unspoiled, pure and holy love for each and every one of us...and God is not going to do anything to keep us from or get in the way of our ability to accept His offer of free salvation through making Jesus Christ Lord of our lives.

Let's look at 1 John 5:14-15.

*“If we ask anything according” to God's will, “he hears us. And if we know he hears us—whatever we ask—we know that we have what we have asked of him.”*

When we pray: do we ask God for things which are according to God's will? How do we know if something is according to God's will? Well, we don't know everything, that's for sure, but we can learn an awful lot about God's will by reading the Bible. Much of what we pray for, is not for our own good. It is not within God's will...and therefore we do not receive it.

Remember, even Jesus prayed for the cup to be removed but that the Father's will be done and the cup was not removed. Remember Paul who prayed for the thorn in his flesh to be removed...the thorn that may very well have kept him humble and reliant upon God? Well, God did not remove that thorn.

Have any of us ever been thankful...later on...that God did not answer a prayer that we had...in the past fervently prayed for? I can think of something very specific, and I can tell you that I probably wouldn't be standing up here right now had God answered that prayer.

There is a country music song called "Unanswered Prayers". Part of the lyrics go like this:

**[Play chorus from YouTube or Spotify of "Unanswered Prayers" by Garth Brooks—No video, just music]**

"Sometimes I thank God for unanswered prayers. Remember when you're talking to the Man upstairs that just because He doesn't answer doesn't mean he don't care. Some of God's greatest gifts are unanswered prayers."

Actually, our prayers are always answered...but sometimes that answer is "No."  
Because what we are asking for is not within God's will.

So, what is God's will? Well for one thing, it is that none of us should perish, but that all of us would call upon the name of the Lord to be saved. That is one prayer that we can know for sure...without a doubt that God will answer! If we come to God, honestly asking Him to forgive us of our sins, honestly repenting or turning away from our sins, honestly giving our lives to Him...honestly calling on the name of Jesus Christ...thanking Him for paying the penalty of our sins through His death on the Cross and asking Him to give us eternal Life...which saves us from eternal hell and damnation...we will without a doubt be saved!!! That prayer will never go unanswered!!!

If we daily and unceasingly ask God to forgive us our sins, keep us from giving into temptation and cause us to grow stronger in His love...that prayer will be answered!!!

Of course we have to honestly want what we are asking. If we ask for the ability to overcome temptation without really wanting to or planning on trying to overcome temptation...well we do have free-will!!! But God will give strength to those who truly ask for it and boldness for those who sincerely seek it.

We have a wonderful example of this in the Book of Acts. Peter and John healed a crippled beggar at the temple gate, and this crippled beggar, who had been crippled from birth caused quite a stir by walking and leaping and praising God in front of crowds of people who had known him all his life. The people were filled with "wonder and amazement at what had happened" to this man.

This gave Peter an excellent opportunity to preach the Gospel, which he did. But the elders and the teachers of the law "were greatly disturbed because" Peter and John were "teaching the people and proclaiming" the resurrection of Jesus from the dead.

So, they put Peter and John in prison. And before releasing Peter and John they threatened them and commanded them "not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus." And after Peter and John went back to their community of faith...what did the congregation pray for???

Let's look at Acts chapter 4:29-31. <sup>29</sup>And now, O Lord, hear their threats, and give us, your servants, great boldness in preaching your word. <sup>30</sup>Stretch out your hand with healing power; may miraculous signs and wonders be done through the name of your holy servant Jesus."

*<sup>31</sup> After this prayer, the meeting place shook, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit. Then they preached the word of God with boldness.*

Did they pray that God would take away their persecution? No.

Did they pray that God would destroy their persecutors? No.

Did they pray that God would allow them to stop witnessing until things quieted down? No.

What did they pray for? They prayed that the Lord would enable them to speak the Word of God with great boldness, despite the threats they were under if they did so.

*And “After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God with boldness.”* Talk about answered prayer!!! Talk about praying within the will of God!

They knew that Jesus had told them that they would be persecuted. They knew that the world would hate them. They didn't ask that the world not hate them...instead, they asked that they have boldness in the face of this hatred to continue to do what is right...that is to preach the Gospel no matter what. Not to hide from the truth because of the threats of men.

We too, as Christians, have the great commission given to us by Jesus Christ Himself: *“Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.”*

If I were a gambler...I'd be willing to bet just about anything that if any of us or all of us together were to sincerely pray for the boldness to speak God's Word despite any and all possible threats that doing so might make to our reputations, our persons, our jobs, our pride, etc....that prayer would be answered!!!

We would all be filled with the Holy Spirit, this place where we are meeting would be shaken, we would speak the Word of God boldly...and the great Lord Jesus Christ Himself only knows what wonders and miraculous signs we would witness in our midst!!! ...as people would be saved...as Bucyrus UMC would grow in numbers and in action...as people would be healed...for the glory and to the glory of God the Father...that others might come to know the saving grace of Jesus Christ!

One author once wrote:

“When the glory of the Father  
Is the goal of every prayer  
When before the throne in Heaven  
Our High Priest presents it there  
When the Spirit prompts the asking  
When the waiting heart believes  
Then we know of each petition  
Everyone who asks receives.”

Let us pray: “Sovereign Lord, you made the heaven and the earth and the sea, and everything in them.” We may sometimes be afraid to share our faith in Christ, so we ask for Your help. Consider the laughter, the scorn, the gossip, the anger, and the isolation that our witnessing to you might bring and enable us “to speak Your Word with great boldness. Stretch out Your hand to heal and perform miraculous signs and wonders through the name of Your Holy Servant Jesus.” Amen.