

God's Wonderful Way Of Answering Prayers.

Text: John 4:46-54

1) He wants to purify our desires

Suggested Hymns:

2) He wants to strengthen our faith

423, 204, 420, 409, 368

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is John 4:46-54, ***“So Jesus came again to Cana of Galilee where He had made the water wine. And there was a certain nobleman whose son was sick at Capernaum.***

“⁴⁷ When he heard that Jesus had come out of Judea into Galilee, he went to Him and implored Him to come down and heal his son, for he was at the point of death. ⁴⁸ Then Jesus said to him, “Unless you people see signs and wonders, you will by no means believe.”

“⁴⁹ The nobleman said to Him, “Sir, come down before my child dies!” ⁵⁰ Jesus said to him, “Go your way; your son lives.” So the man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him, and he went his way.

“⁵¹ And as he was now going down, his servants met him and told him, saying, “Your son lives!” ⁵² Then he inquired of them the hour when he got better. And they said to him, “Yesterday at the seventh hour the fever left him.”

“⁵³ So the father knew that it was at the same hour in which Jesus said to him, “Your son lives.” And he himself believed, and his whole household. ⁵⁴ This again is the second sign Jesus did when He had come out of Judea into Galilee. (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

Scripture says in Psalm 92:5, ***“⁵ O LORD, how great are Your works! Your thoughts are very deep.*** And in Isaiah 55:8-9, ***“⁸ For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways,” says the Lord. ⁹***

“For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways, And My thoughts than your thoughts.

These Scripture verses also apply to the way in which God answers our prayers, as we shall learn from our text. The theme for today is *God Answers Our Prayers in His Own Way*. May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. God Answers Our Prayers In His Own Way Because He Wants To Purify Our Desires

A certain nobleman, an officer of Herod’s court, was in great distress. His son was at the point of death. When this nobleman heard that Jesus was coming out of Judea into Galilee, he went to Him and pleaded with Him that He would come down and heal his son.

Yet Jesus’ answer to this urgent plea sounded like a harsh refusal, ***“Unless you people see signs and wonders, you will by no means believe.”*** Was there something wrong with his prayer?

Surely his prayer was commendable in many respects. He realised his helplessness and asked the true Helper for help. He believed that Jesus was able and willing to help. He requested healing not for himself but for his son, who was very dear to him.

He had journeyed all the way from Capernaum to Cana to place his petition before Jesus. Would not you and I have done the same? Have we not often prayed similarly under similar circumstances?

Yet, in reply to his request Jesus said, ***“Unless you people see signs and wonders, you will by no means believe.”*** Why? Jesus knew his heart. It was not so much his prayer as the condition of his heart which Jesus wished to correct.

The nobleman believed in Jesus, but he did not yet realise how much he needed Christ. He knew that he needed Him in bodily affliction, but he did not yet understand that he needed Him first and above all for his and his family’s spiritual welfare.

If Jesus had at once granted his request, he might have assumed an attitude similar to that which his fellow-townsmen showed, as recorded in John 6:14-27.

This is the incident of Jesus feeding the five-thousand. They wanted to take Jesus by force and make Him king but Jesus departed from them.

On the following day the people *also got into boats and came to Capernaum, seeking Jesus.* ²⁵ *And when they found Him on the other side of the sea, they said to Him, “Rabbi, when did You come here?”* ²⁶ *Jesus answered them and said, “Most assuredly, I say to you, you seek Me, not because you saw the signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled.* ²⁷ *“Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life”*

The purpose of Jesus actions was to purify the desires of the Nobleman. The nobleman’s thoughts were dwelling at that sick-bed in Capernaum. He thought, If Jesus will only restore my son to health, I will be satisfied. The trouble with him was not that he expected too much of Jesus, but that he asked for too little.

In His reply Jesus did not refuse his request, but He diverted his attention from his sick son to his own spiritual needs. How is it with your faith? Jesus is in effect asking, Do you look on Me just as a miracle-worker? Would you come to Me only when you are in bodily need? Would you be just as earnest and urgent in seeking the welfare of your soul and that of your family? The immediate problem was not to prolong the child’s life, but to improve his father’s spiritual health.

The application for our lives is that God wants us to bring all our needs to His attention. We read in Philippians 4:6, ⁶ *Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God.*

We are not presumptuous if we ask Him to heal our loved ones, even when they are at the point of death, when doctors have given up hope. Scripture says in 1 Samuel 2:6-8, ⁶ *“The LORD kills and makes alive; He brings down to the grave and brings up.* ⁷ *The LORD makes poor and makes rich; He brings low and lifts up.* ⁸ *He raises the poor from the dust And lifts the beggar from the ash heap, To set them among princes And make them inherit the throne of glory. “For the pillars of the earth are the LORD’s, And He has set the world upon them.”*¹

And Isaiah 59:1, ¹ *Behold, the LORD's hand is not shortened, That it cannot save; Nor His ear heavy, That it cannot hear.*

We are not asking too much when we pray for other temporal blessings, such as employment, rain in times of drought, preservation of peace, etc. We are encouraged to ask for these gifts, even when we cannot see how God might grant them, even when God must perform a miracle to answer our prayers.

We read in Job 5:8-10, ⁸ *“But as for me, I would seek God, And to God I would commit my cause -- ⁹ Who does great things, and unsearchable, Marvelous things without number. ,¹⁰ He gives rain on the earth, And sends waters on the fields.”*

But in our praying, too, the rule applies as we read in Matthew 6:33, ³³ *“But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.* In our prayers, the Second Petition, *Thy kingdom come,* is to take preeminence over the Fourth Petition, *Give us this day our daily bread.*

God wants all things, including His answers to all our prayers, to serve the spiritual welfare of His children. ²⁸ *And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.*²

Hence, when we ask for temporal blessings, our heart's desire should be that the fulfilment of our wishes will promote the interests of God's kingdom for ourselves and others. If God does not answer our prayers as we expected, but rather in His own way, this does not mean that we had no faith. Nor does it mean that we asked for too much.³

If God answers our prayers contrary to our expectations, it is because His way of answering our prayers will best serve our spiritual welfare and the advancement of His kingdom.⁴ Should we not thank God for this? And should we not pray all the more confidently, knowing that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us,⁵ and that He often gives us more and greater blessings than we ask for? This is exactly what Jesus did for the nobleman.

2. God Answers Our Prayers In His Own Way Because He Wants To Strengthen Our Faith

It did not occur to the nobleman in voicing his request that his faith needed strengthening. Obviously his faith was weak. He thought Jesus could not heal from a distance, and that He must come to his house.

Remember the centurion who had great faith said, ***“Lord, I am not worthy that You should come under my roof. But only speak a word, and my servant will be healed.”***⁶

The nobleman, on the other hand, thought that Jesus must reach his home while his son was still living. And he thought he must see before he could believe.

But faith, whether weak or strong, leans on Jesus, and the merciful Saviour would not break the bruised reed nor quench the smoking flax. His purpose is to strengthen the nobleman’s weak faith.

If Jesus had answered his prayer as he expected, his faith would have remained weak; he would have continued to insist on seeing before believing. Therefore Jesus said, ***“Unless you people see signs and wonders, you will by no means believe.”*** By these words Jesus does not refuse the man’s request for a miracle, but points out to him his weakness: You think you cannot believe until you see the miracle. Believe without seeing!

The nobleman accepted the reproof but persisted in his plea, ***“Sir, come down before my child dies!”*** Jesus replied, ***“Go your way; your son lives.”*** Jesus put the Nobleman’s weak faith to a test. You believe that I am able to heal your son; will you believe, without seeing any evidence, that I have granted your request? Will you trust My word?

By this same word ***“Go your way; your son lives”*** Jesus strengthened the Nobleman’s faith. The Word is the foundation of faith as well as the means of strengthening it. The nobleman immediately showed that his faith was strengthened. He believed the word that Jesus had spoken to him. The only evidence he had of his son’s recovery was the word of Jesus.

He proved that he believed that word by going his way. He was not even in a great hurry to get home, where he could verify the word of Jesus. Capernaum was 25 km northeast of Cana, and he could have reached Capernaum the same night, but why should he anxiously run home?

Scripture says in Isaiah 28:16, ¹⁶ *Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: "Behold, I lay in Zion a stone for a foundation, A tried stone, a precious cornerstone, a sure foundation; Whoever believes will not act hastily."* The Nobleman believed the word of Jesus that his son was well. That word was sufficient for him.

The next day, on his way home, his servants met him and eagerly told him the good news, *"Your son lives!"* The nobleman carefully inquired of them the exact hour when his son began to amend. When they told him, *Yesterday at the seventh hour the fever left him*, the father knew that it was at the same hour in which Jesus said to him, *"Your son lives!"* His faith in Jesus was confirmed. He knew now that he could always trust the word of Jesus and believe without seeing.

And he himself believed, and his whole household. He believed that Jesus was the promised Messiah and Saviour whom God had sent. And as a true home missionary he taught this same faith to his whole house, his family and servants.

Did Jesus not give him a much greater blessing than he asked for by answering his prayer in his own way? No doubt the nobleman was deeply grateful for his son's recovery, but I believe he was even more grateful for the spiritual blessings received.

The application for us is that God often answers our prayers, not according to our expectations, but in His own way, because He wants to strengthen our faith.

As Christians we believe that God hears the prayers of His children. We believe that He hears our prayers not because of any goodness in us, not because we have made ourselves in any way deserving of God's help, but for the sake of the all-sufficient merits of our Saviour Jesus Christ.

Every Christian is conscious of his un-worthiness when he prays and trusts in the grace of God revealed in His Son.

But do you really take God at His word? Or do you look upon prayer as an experiment? Everything else has failed, so you thought you would "try prayer?" If your prayers are granted, then you would believe in God? God has not taught us to make such use of prayer. We are not to pray in the spirit of adventure.

Rather, we are firmly to believe God's promises, however dark the outlook, regardless of the objections of our reason, as recorded in Matthew 21:22, ²² ***“And whatever things you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive.”***

God frequently answers our prayers in His own way in order to test our faith, so that we might learn to believe His promises not only after He fulfils them, but also before He fulfils them.

When we pray for daily bread and other temporal gifts, do we believe His promise, ***No good thing will He withhold From those who walk uprightly?***⁷

Do we believe God's promises when we pray for strength to resist sin? For example 2 Thessalonians 3:3, ³ ***But the Lord is faithful, who will establish you and guard you from the evil one.***

Do we believe God's promises when we pray for greater love and devotion to the Lord and His work? We read in Luke 11:13, ¹³ ***“If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!”***

And in Hebrews 13:20-21, ²⁰ ***Now may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, ²¹ make you complete in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever.***

When we pray for success in our church work, do we believe God's promise, as written in 1 Corinthians 15:58, ⁵⁸ ***Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord?***

God answers our prayers in such a way as to make us realise that He has heard us because He has promised, because He cannot go back on His word. Thus He strengthens our faith and teaches us to put our whole confidence in His Word.

The hymnist writes, ⁸

Leave all to His direction;
In wisdom He doth reign;
And in a way most wondrous

His course He will maintain.

Like the nobleman, we, too, have reason to thank the Lord for answering our prayers in His own way and giving us greater blessings than we ask for. Let us, then, ask great things of God and expect great things of God. Lord, increase our faith. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ See also Deut. 32:39

² Romans 8:28

³ Ephesians 3:20

⁴ Cf. 2 Cor. 12:7-10

⁵ 1 John 5:14

⁶ Matthew 8:8

⁷ Psalm 84:11

⁸ Hymn 409 v 4