

GETTING PROMPT RESPONSES TO YOUR PRAYERS

“And it shall come to pass that before they call, I will answer, and while they are yet speaking, I will hear” [Is. 65:24]

This week’s lesson is a prompt answer to my prayer! I was asking the Lord to confirm if in deed He wanted me to write on this theme that I thought was over-flogged. Just then, an Internet member of our Bible Class e-mailed me a story which has turned out to be a very appropriate introduction to today’s lesson. So, I have taken it that it is God’s answer to my wish that we discuss the subject this week.

Two men who had survived a shipwreck swam ashore to a small desert island. They decided to each move to the opposite end of the barren island and to pray for their rescue. Mr. A prayed for food and the next morning, he saw a fruit-bearing tree with ripe fruits on his side. Mr. B’s side remained barren. As he felt lonely, he prayed for a wife. The next day, a woman, the sole survivor of another shipwreck, swam safely to his side of the island. Other prayers were so promptly answered. Finally, he prayed for rescue. Immediately, a ship anchored by the island, which had room for him and his new family and wealth. As he was about to leave, a voice from heaven asked him, “Why are you abandoning your companion on the island?” Mr. A replied, “It is not my fault that his prayers have not been answered.” The voice answered back, “he had only one prayer which I answered: he prayed that all your prayers be answered promptly.”

Some of us are con-artists! Just because Jesus Christ has said that “whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in My name, He may give it you” [Jn 15:16], and that “every one that asketh receiveth, and he that seeketh findeth, and to him that knocketh, it shall be opened” [Mk 7:8], we then think that we can just “stroll” into His presence and come away with prompt answers. In practice such a privilege belongs only to those who are qualified to use it! It is good to know this so that you don’t get frustrated when your prayers appear not to be answered

Seeking a prompt response is not an unholy thing. How would you feel if you went for a medical check-up and weeks later the doctor had still not told you the outcome? Certainly, you would not fold your arms, saying, “I am waiting on my doctor.” If you are to walk by faith, it is important to know whether God wants you to move on or wait where you are. Therefore, there is nothing wrong with knowing promptly whether His answer is “yes” or “no” or “wait.” It is only then that you can confidently say, “I am waiting on the Lord!”

In today’s lesson, we shall examine this important subject to guide our daily walk.

1. What is a prompt response?

God sent Isaiah the prophet to inform Hezekiah to get ready to die because his time was up. The king turned on his bed and prayed for an extension of time. The prophet was still in the king's court when God sent him back to inform the king that he had received a 15-year extension [Is. 38:1-5]. On the other hand, when king Saul wanted to go to war against the Philistines, he went to God in prayer for guidance and "the Lord answered him not, neither by dreams, nor by Urim, nor by prophets" [1 Sam. 28:5-6]. Paul had "a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan." Thrice he prayed for it to be removed but each time the Lord told him that He would not [2 Cor. 12:8-9].

From the foregoing examples, we learn the following truths:

- (a) a prompt response is better than no response at all. Saul was forced to consult a medium because God refused to speak to him [1 Sam. 28:7];
- (b) a prompt response is not always positive, or the one we desire. God said 'yes' to Hezekiah but 'no' to Paul. Nevertheless, both of them now knew what to do. Paul knew he had to live with his affliction for the rest of his life. Hezekiah knew that no matter his body pains and failing health, he was going to live longer.

Getting prompt responses to prayers plays a major role in our daily walk with God. According to an African proverb, the tortoise says that it is a good thing that he walks slowly because he could be going in the wrong direction! We cannot afford to take that chance because we walk very fast. So, by receiving instant approval or rebuke from God, we are able to remain on course at all times. "And thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, this is the way, walk ye in it, when ye turn to the right hand, and when ye turn to the left" [Is. 30:21].

2. Case Studies

I have selected cases to illustrate the following types of responses:

- *Prompt and positive*
- *Prompt but negative*
- *Prompt but not yet*

Prompt and positive

(a) *Solomon's prayer for wisdom* [1 Kgs 3: 3-28]

Soon after Solomon had ascended the throne, he demonstrated his love of God by "walking in the statutes of David his father" [v. 3]. He went to Gibeon and offered "a thousand burnt offerings" [v. 4]. As described in Lev. 6: 8-13, the burnt offering symbolizes Christ's offering of Himself as a mark of total submission to

His Father's will. So, Solomon's offering was like making himself available for God's service.

God did not wait for Solomon to ask because He was already pleased with how he went about seeking His face. He appeared to Solomon in a dream that night and said, "Ask what I shall give thee" [v. 5]. He asked for wisdom so as to be able to rule the people of Israel [v. 9]. God was so pleased with his choice that He did not only grant his request, He added riches and honour [v. 13].

The next morning, Solomon had to decide a very delicate case of two harlots with one living child. His ruling was so profound that all Israel "feared the king; for they saw that the wisdom of God was in him, to do judgment" [v. 28].

(b) *Jehosaphat's deliverance* [2 Chron. 20: 1-30]

Jehosaphat was the son of Asa, king of Judah whose heart was "perfect all his days" [2 Chron. 15:17]. With such a solid foundation, the Lord was with him [2 Chron. 17:3]. He ran a very successful gospel ministry, sending out princes and Levites and "they taught in Judah and had the book of the Lord with them, and went about throughout all the cities of Judah and taught the people. And the fear of the Lord fell upon all the kingdoms of all the lands that were round about Judah, so that they made no war against Jehosaphat" [2 Chron. 17:7-10].

Success has its traps. Abundant riches and honour got into his head and he befriended Ahab, the idolatrous king of Israel [2 Chron. 18:1]. One product of that relationship was his spiritually misguided assistance to Ahab to wage war against Syria over Ramoth-Gilead [2 Chron. 18:3-34]. Ahab was killed in that war. God sent a seer, Jehu, to tell Jehosaphat, "shouldest thou help the ungodly and love them that hate the Lord? Therefore is wrath upon thee from before the Lord" [2 Chron. 19:2]. So, it was Jehosaphat's alliance with Ahab, even when he knew that God had not authorized the war against Syria, that attracted the three-pronged attack on his kingdom from the children of Moab, Ammon and others [2 Chron. 20:1-2].

The first thing that Jehosaphat did was to re-establish his close relationship with God. He proclaimed a fast throughout his kingdom. Then, he gathered all his people, including women and children, and assembled a huge congregation before the temple that Solomon had built. Remember that God had promised Solomon that all prayers offered in that temple would be answered "perpetually" [2 Chron. 7:15-16]. Jehosaphat said a most powerful prayer, reminding God of His promises to "Abraham Thy friend forever" and surrendering himself and His people completely into God's hands [2 Chron. 20: 6-13].

There and then, the Holy Spirit descended on Jahezziel and the Lord assured Jehosaphat that the battle was the Lord's [v.15]. Without throwing a single spear,

Jehosaphat won a major victory and it took three days to gather the spoil of the enemies! [v.25].

(c) *The Apostles pray for boldness [Acts 4: 23-31]*

Signs and wonders followed the disciples soon after Pentecost Sunday, and that got the powerful Jewish council, the Sanhedrin, duly worried. To cap it, Peter healed a lame beggar at the gate of the temple. So, he and John were arrested and put in jail, hoping thereby that they could be silenced. When they were brought for trial, they demonstrated boldness because they were under the influence of the Holy Spirit. In fact, Peter's sermon was so bold that the council attributed the poorly educated Apostles' boldness to the fact that they had been with Jesus [v.13]. Nevertheless, they set them free but commanded them no more to teach or preach in the name of Jesus [v.18].

That was the setting when Peter and John returned to their colleagues to narrate their ordeal. There and then, they raised a prayer, ending with "and now, Lord, behold their threatenings; and grant unto Thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak Thy word, by stretching forth Thine hand to heal; and that signs and wonders may be done by the name of Thy Holy Child Jesus" [vv. 29-30].

What was God's prompt response? "And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together, and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness" [v.31].

Prompt but negative

(a) *The Israelites rebel against God [Num. 14:11-24]*

It wasn't the first or second time that they had rebelled against God. This was the tenth! [v.22] Twelve spies had been sent to assess the Promised Land. With the exception of Caleb and Joshua, the other ten brought an evil report, which the people believed [vv. 1-5].

God came down into the camp [when the people tried to stone Moses, Joshua and Caleb] with the aim of wiping out all the people with pestilence [vv. 6-10]. Moses fell on his face and prayed for God's mercy "as Thou hast forgiven this people, from Egypt even until now" [19]. The Lord pardoned them *for that moment* but swore that none of that generation that provoked Him would enter the Promised Land [vv. 22-23]. From that day on, Moses never again prayed to God on the matter because God had said, "no!"

(b) *The death of David's son of adultery [2 Sam. 12:15-23]*

God Himself has called David the man after His own heart [1 Sam. 13:14]. While in his teens, he was anointed king to succeed Saul. For the next 13 years or so, he

suffered persecution in the hands of Saul who wanted him dead. It was during that period that David wrote most of the psalms credited to him. However, by the time he came to the throne at age 30, he began to lose part of his spiritual tone. Instead of leading his troops to war, he began to sleep in his palace during the day. It was after waking up one evening that he saw beautiful Bathsheba, Uriah's wife, having a bath [**2 Sam. 11:2**]. He had an adulterous affair with her that led to a pregnancy [**v.5**]. His attempts to cover it up led to Uriah's death. Then, David married his wife.

The whole thing displeased God and He sent Prophet Nathan to convey His anger to David [**2 Sam. 12:1-7**]. David repented and he was forgiven, meaning that his vow that the culprit be put to death [Nathan had used the allegory of a poor man and a rich man to make his presentation] [**v.5**] had been voided. However, the son of adultery would die and David's household would no longer know peace [**vv. 10-14**]. Soon after, the child fell ill. David fasted and prayed for the boy's life for seven days and nights, to no avail. The child still died [**v.18**]. God's response to David was an emphatic "no!" This story suggests that your present is more important to God than your past [**Ezek. 33:12-13**].

(c) *The thorn in Paul's flesh* [**2 Cor. 12:7-10**]

Saul, christened Paul, was a well-known persecutor of the early church. However, after his dramatic conversion by Jesus Christ Himself on his way to Damascus, Paul became a star witness for Christ and the acknowledged Apostle of the Gentiles [**Rom. 11:13**]. God also gave him the privilege to visit heaven in a trance [**2 Cor. 12:1-6**]. Perhaps, to make sure that the superior spiritual position that those revelations had placed him did not get into his head, Paul was afflicted with a thorn in the flesh, said to be the messenger of Satan "to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure" [**v.7**]. It is not clear what this messenger of Satan is but I suspect that it was a Satanic mark on Paul which made him a target of hatred, attacks and persecution, as his account of his sufferings suggests [**2 Cor. 11:16-27**].

He prayed three times for it to be removed and each time the Lord told him, "My grace is sufficient for thee; for My strength is made perfect in weakness" [**v.9**]. Thereafter, he accepted his fate and "took pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong" [**v.10**]. That was the will of God.

Prompt but not yet

A good example here is *Miriam's leprosy*, inflicted on her by God because of her envy against her brother, Moses, for his superior spiritual relationship with God. Moses prayed for her healing but God replied promptly as follows:

If her father had but spit in her face, should she not be ashamed seven days? Let her be shut out from the camp seven days and after that let her be received in again [Num. 12:14]

With that assurance, further prayers for her healing were not necessary. The congregation merely waited for her to serve out her full term of seven days after which she became healed [v.15].

3. Lessons learned

It is the desire of every believer to receive prompt responses to his/her prayers. Such responses take various forms, such as dreams, visions, prophecies, circumstances or sudden awareness [Neh. 7:5]. They can come directly from God, Jesus Christ or the Holy Spirit, or through angels. What is important is to be spiritually alert.

From the cases that we have examined, the following factors seem to facilitate the possibility of a prompt response to our prayers:

- (a) ***The believer's prior relationship with God:*** those with a history of close relationship with Him are more likely to hear promptly [positive or negative or wait] than those who don't as yet know Him. So, re-examine your relationship with Him. If you are backslidden, come back right away.
- (b) ***Those who give first before asking tend to receive more:*** the Lord has said, "offer unto God thanksgiving, and pay thy vows unto the Most High: and call upon Me in the day of trouble and I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify Me" [Ps. 50:14-15].
- (c) ***Pray more for others than for yourself:*** in the words of Jesus, "if you have not been faithful in that which is another man's, who shall give you that which is your own?" [Lk 16:12]. As our introductory story has taught us, when we stand in the gap for others, God will stand in the gap for us.

4. One final word

Some years ago, my children taught me an interesting lesson on this subject. Several times, they had asked for an increase in their pocket money, which I flatly turned down. Then, on Father's Day, they sent me a greeting card that was in the form of a school report card. In such areas as "relations with the family", "attention to our home work", etc., they scored me 'A+'. However, on "pocket money", they scored me a 'C', followed by a remark, "Daddy, try to raise your grade here next term." I raised it the next day! That is how God answers us promptly if we know how to ask Him.