

AN UNFORTUNATE ANSWER TO PRAYER

1 Sam. 8:10-22

Intro: Many have tried to deal at one time or another with the problem of unanswered prayer. We may begin the Christian life with the idea that God will answer any and all of our prayers, but it is not long before we learn that God's ways and our ways are different and we find ourselves saying what Asaph said in Psalm 77,

"Will the Lord cast off for ever? and will he be favorable no more? Is his mercy clean gone for ever? doth his promise fail for evermore? Hath God forgotten to be gracious? hath he in anger shut up his tender mercies?" (vv. 7-9).

Or we have Asaph's question in Psa. 73:11b,

"Is there knowledge in the most High?"

And then he adds in v. 16,

"When I thought to know this, it was too painful for me."

"A silent heaven is the greatest mystery of our existence" (Sir Robert Anderson).

Questions! Painful questions! The problem of unanswered prayer! There comes a time in practically everyone's life (if I were omniscient I would probably leave the practically out of that statement) when we ask these painful questions.

Tonight I want to talk to you about an equally difficult problem, the problem of answered prayer.

Have you ever thought about the 15th verse of Psa. 106? "And he gave them their request; but sent leanness into their soul." There is a truth here which every child of God needs to learn.

There are times when answered prayer is far more tragic, more unfortunate, than unanswered prayer.

Such is the case before us tonight.

The point is this: SOMETIMES WE CAN TALK GOD INTO THINGS WHICH IT IS NOT HIS WILL TO GIVE US AT THE TIME.

Let us note the circumstances:

- (1) That which the people were asking for at this time, a king, had been expressed by God as His will eventually for His people. Cf. Gen. 49:10; Num. 24:17; Deut. 17:14-20.
- (2) The timing seems to be right. The judges had failed to give Israel proper leadership. Samuel was old. His sons were not fit to lead the people. Why should they not do something while Samuel was still alive to advise and to guide them.
- (3) The threat posed by Israel's enemies seemed to demand that some solution be sought immediately for the security of the nation.

So, what they asked was not completely out of the question.

Why, then, was God's answer unfortunate? There are several answers.

I. THEIR REQUEST INDICATED A REJECTION OF GOD'S RULE OVER HIS PEOPLE. Cf. 1 Sam. 8:7.

All they could see was the present confusion: their enemies, the age of Samuel, the character of Samuel's sons, etc.

They were so taken up with the human aspects that they could not see the divine. From Exodus 19 on God had been ruling over His people from heaven; now they wanted a change. They could no longer be satisfied with a King they could not see. They wanted one they could see. (See Exodus 19:5, 6 where the word kingdom is used for the first time with reference to God's rule over His people.)

They could not say with Paul, "While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal."

How wonderful it would have been if someone from the people had prayed the prayer of Psa. 59:13, "'Consume them in wrath, consume them, that they may not be: and let them know that God ruleth in Jacob unto the ends of the earth."

Cf. Isa. 26:3, 4.

II. THE PEOPLE WERE CLAIMING OMNISCIENCE REGARDING THE WILL OF GOD FOR THEM.

One of the greatest factors in the will of God is often the matter of time. It is not that what we ask is completely out of agreement with the will of God, but we receive no answer because the time is not right.

Think how Abraham and Sarah struggled with time. Think also of Joseph. Moses had the same problem--and so on through the word of God. Even Peter wanted to make our Lord King before the time.

God is never late, but neither is he ahead of time. Remember the statements through the Gospel of John that His time was not yet come.

Paul tells us in Galatians 4:4, "But when the fulness of the time was come . . ."

To the people, the time was at hand that they should have a king. TO GOD, IT WAS NEAR, BUT IT HAD NOT YET COME. (David was God's choice.) It is often the case that, when we are right on the threshold of seeing God do something, we foolishly move ahead of God by taking things into our own hands.

How important it is that we leave the will of God in the hands of God! He is perfectly capable of meeting our needs. <sup>GOD</sup>

TO ASK FOR THE RIGHT THING AT THE WRONG TIME IS  
 III. IT REVEALED THE LOW LEVEL TO WHICH THE PEOPLE HAD FALLEN SPIRITUALLY. Cf. 1 Sam. 8:5, 19, 20.

They had forgotten their calling (Deut. 7:1-6; 14:2).

Cf. Num. 33:50-56.

One of the greatest mistakes which we as the people of God can make is to take what we find in the world, their standards, their methods, their principles, and to bring them into the work of God.

There is more than one way in which we want to be "like all the nations." Oh, that we would learn what God told Isaiah in 55:8, 9,

"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts."

Do we know these words so well that we have never really learned what they mean?

There are those today who would obliterate the line of distinction between the people of God and the people of the world. We want to be "like all the nations." If we are not a people who feed daily on the Word of God, it is very likely that, though we know and love the Lord, we can get off on the wrong track spiritually--and be more like the world than we are like God's people should be.

When James and John wanted to call down fire on the Samaritans who would not receive the Lord Jesus, our Lord said to them, "Ye know not what spirit ye are of" (Luke 9:55).

Later when they asked to sit at his right hand and left hand when He came into His Kingdom, He said, "Ye know not what ye ask" (Mark 10:38). They were talking like unsaved Gentiles. They had the wrong motives. And so Jesus said to them, "But so shall it not be among you: but whosoever will be great among you, shall be your minister: And who-

TO ASK FOR THE WRONG THING.

soever of you will be the chiefest, shall be servant of all. For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto . . ." (Mark 10:43-45).

May I ask a question?

Are you becoming acquainted with the ways of God--not as you see them in church, or as you might see them in other Christian works--but as you see them in the Word of God? In our ignorance of the Word we might also desire to be "like all the nations," thinking that this is the way God works. If so, we are liable to make some decisions and even to pray prayers that may get answered to our own confusion and dismay.

IV. THE PEOPLE SEEMED TO BE TOTALLY UNCONCERNED ABOUT WHAT THEIR REQUEST WOULD MEAN IN THE LIVES OF OTHERS--THEIR CHILDREN, THEIR SERVANTS, ETC. Cf. vv. 11-18.

Would you be more careful about imposing your will on the will of God IF you knew it would have the wrong kind of effects in the lives of your children?

Apparently they thought that their king, or they and their king, could take care of any problem that might arise. It never occurred to them that their king might be the problem.

Concl: It does not take much reading <sup>in</sup> the Word for us to discover how much we need to learn about the will of God.

Teach me Thy Way, O Lord; Teach me Thy Way!  
Thy guiding grace afford; Teach me Thy Way!  
Help me to walk aright, more by faith less by sight,  
Lead me with heav'nly light; Teach me Thy way!

When doubts and fears arise; Teach me Thy Way!  
When storms o'er spread the skies; Teach me Thy Way!  
Shine through the cloud and rain, thro' sorrow,  
toil and pain,  
Make Thou my pathway plain; Teach me Thy Way!

Long as my life shall last; Teach me Thy Way!  
Where'er my lot is cast; Teach me Thy Way!  
Until the race is run, until the journey's done,  
Until the crown is won, Teach me Thy Way!