

St Martins C3 – October 22, 2023

Miracles – Unanswered Prayer

Sermon Notes:

In this series, we want to lift your faith to believe in God to do miracles in your life and the lives of those around you. As we pray, we see God come through in powerful ways. But not always.

There are times when we pray, and it seems as though God does not answer. We need to understand what God is doing when we have unanswered prayers.

1 – The World is Broken

Read Luke 13:1-4

This is Jesus' chance to answer the question of pain and suffering in the world. Instead, Jesus accepts suffering as a reality. The world was created good, but the result of sin and the curse is a world that is marred by death and destruction.

The answer to this suffering is in part the miracles we see. It is also that Jesus participates in our suffering, which shows that He has a purpose in it. He is with us in our suffering, His presence and peace are great miracles all on their own.

Read Romans 5:3-4

Your eternal glory is far more important than the suffering you are facing right now.

2 - The World is Being Redeemed

Read John 16:33

It is true that Jesus has overcome the world and that we can experience miracles. It is also true we live in a world of trials and sorrows. Jesus' victory means the way of his kingdom is already here, but we don't see all of it. It is the now and the not yet.

Read 1 Corinthians 13:12

3 – We Trust God

Ultimately, we trust God knows the right way to rule the world and we trust him with the mystery.

Read Proverbs 16:2

We don't know what is best in the short term let alone the long term. We don't know whether God saying yes to our prayer is the best thing or not.

Read Hebrews 11:6; 33-39

True faith says something about the nature of God. God not only exists - He is good. He rewards those who sincerely seek Him.

May we have the faith of the others. They still believed God existed and that he rewards those who sincerely seek him – even if they never got to see it. Continue to believe that God can do great things in you and through you even if you haven't seen the answer you were after.

Questions for Connect Groups:

What stood out to you from today's message?

What does this message tell you about God?

What does this message tell you about humans?

How come one person is completely healed and another isn't?

Share your experiences with unanswered prayer.

Have you ever had a prayer that wasn't answered and looking back you can see why?

How much does a prayer being unanswered affect the way you pray in the future?

Where is God in our suffering? How do we know he cares?

What good things might God do other than answer your prayer?

What does it look like to hold onto God's goodness even when a prayer is unanswered?

What have you stopped praying about that you feel God asking you to pray about again?

Songs from Today:

God So Loved, King of Glory, Who You Say I Am, He Toka, I Will Boast in Christ

Monday's Devotion – Top Unanswered Prayers

Read Mark 6:1-6; 9:14-29

The Bible records some remarkable stories of miracles. People are healed, delivered and raised from the dead. Yet, there are also many times when miracles don't happen. This week we will look at a number of these examples, examining why prayers go unanswered and what God might be doing during those times.

In our first two stories, we see the importance of belief. Our faith in God is an important element in praying for miracles. In the first story, Jesus himself is only able to do a few miracles due to their complete distrust of Him. Their lack of faith is a barrier to their ability to receive miracles.

In the second example, we see the disciples unable to cast out an evil spirit and Jesus initially points to their belief but later points to the need to go further in prayer at times and even to fast.

Too much can be made of our need for faith. Faith is not something we can drum up in ourselves. Rather it is a response to knowing who God is and what He wants to do. If I pray knowing that God wants to heal and can heal then I have faith. Faith is then simply accepting God's will for any given situation.

As we pray for miracles, let us take the time to see what God wants to do and how and then do it. Our prayer should be the same as the father of the boy in Mark 9. "I believe, but help me overcome my unbelief!"

Tuesday's Devotion – The War Inside

Read James 4:1-3; Psalm 66:16-20; 1 Peter 3:12

Some people talk about prayer like it is a get-out-of-jail-free card or like a wish to a genie. If we pray with enough faith, using the right words then God is forced to do what we request. The Scriptures bear witness that this is a false way of thinking.

James tells his readers that we each have a war inside of us. There are evil desires that are fighting against the will of God. They are selfish desires where we want to get what works best for us with no thought towards God, let alone what is best for the rest of the world. If God can see that our selfishness is fueling our prayer there is a strong chance He will not answer it.

The Psalmist reflects that their answer to prayer only came because they were willing to ask God with a heart filled with repentance. Peter also quotes from the Psalms (34:16), to show that sinful and evil hearts will not have their prayers answered.

Selfish hearts and sinful lives are barriers to having prayers answered. This does not mean that we need to be perfect for God to answer our prayers. It is not that good people get more prayers answered, as though there was a direct correlation between morality and the number of prayers answered.

However, we need to ensure that when we ask God for something we are doing it with pure motives. We are doing it from a relationship with Him not just because of what He can do for us.

Today, examine your life and ensure you are walking in a good relationship with God and praying for what He wants, not just what you want.

Wednesday's Devotion – Take This Cup From Me

Read Matthew 26:36-44

So far this week, we have seen the things that can prevent our prayers from being answered. However, there are times when we pray with faith, have pure motivations and are free from sin and God still doesn't answer our prayers in the way we hope.

Jesus had the greatest faith, most pure motivations, never sinned and had a symbiotic relationship with God and yet when He prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane, He did not get the answer He wanted.

He persevered in prayer ardently seeking God three times. Yet, He still felt God say "no" to His request.

There will be times that we pray and we don't get the answer we thought we should. It is not that we want to take God's job, it is just that we don't understand what God is doing in a particular moment.

It is a mystery that is not easily resolved.

Yet, if we can get to the same place Jesus did we will be able to surrender ourselves to God's will and trust that He has what is best for us.

If there has been a prayer that God hasn't answered, go back to Him again and ask Him either to bring a breakthrough or to give you wisdom as to why He chose not to answer it.

Thursday's Devotion – The Silence of God

Read Matthew 27:35-46

It is one thing to have God say “no” to our prayer. It is another thing entirely to feel as though God isn't listening at all. Yet, that is what Jesus experienced.

As he hung dying on the cross, many voices were speaking. The voices of the gamblers ignored Him. The voices of the doubters abused Him. The voice of the gloaters berated Him. Yet, the one voice He wanted to hear did not speak.

No voice came from Heaven affirming what He was doing was right. No inner whisper spoke to Him of God's pleasure. In that moment, the pre-existently connected Father and Son became estranged. He felt as though God had abandoned Him.

He was completely alone.

We all have times when we struggle to hear God's voice. We struggle to know His presence is with us. We have heard the Holy Spirit is with us, but we feel He must be buried so deep inside us that He is like a small voice in a distant cave.

In those moments, we know that we worship a God who is not unfamiliar with our struggles. He was the man of all sorrows, and he knows the sorrow that we carry. We can turn to Him and ask Him to fulfil His promise to be with us always, even to the end of the age.

Take a moment to cry out to Him now and lay your sorrows before Him. Though you ache you will not break.

Friday Devotion – Strength in Weakness

Read 2 Corinthians 12:7-11

The most influential writer in all of Christian history is the Apostle Paul. He was specially called to spread the message of Christianity to the non-Jewish world and even had a special revelation of Heaven. However, he also had unanswered prayer.

Many have speculated what Paul's thorn in the flesh was. Some say it was a problem with his eyesight, some say he had anxiety, and some say it was debilitating physical pain. All we know is that God chose not to answer his request for it to be removed.

Instead, he was told by God that he needed to rely on God's grace for each day rather than have deliverance.

He learned a lesson that we all need to learn: a dependent life is more important than an easy life. As Paul chose to give himself fully to God he relied on Him more completely.

If everything was easy for us and God answered every prayer we would not need to rely on Him as much for the strength to get through the day.

There will be times when God chooses to answer your prayer and bring healing. We should continue to seek Him for that. But in the times that He doesn't, may we push into Him more and ask Him what He is hoping to teach us. Why not ask Him that right now?