

Place: Lurgan Baptist: 4:4:2006

Reading: Deuteronomy 3:21-29

FROM EGYPT TO CANAAN

14. WHEN GOD SAID “ NO,”

One of our hymns asks that we may be taught the “ *patience of unanswered prayer.* ” We have before us now, a prayer that was not answered positively, and an exhibition of patience in the man who prayed but did not receive. What we might call the unanswered prayers of the Bible, the prayer of Abraham that Ishmael might live before the Lord, of Balaam that he might die the death of the righteous, of Paul over the thorn in his flesh, are very profitable to consider. Now when we think of Moses, we usually think of him, as the great leader and lawgiver. Of course he was a magnificent leader, and great lawgiver. But he was also a teacher, a prophet, and a mighty prayer warrior. We find many examples of Moses’ dedicated prayer life in the Old Testament. When God sent the plagues on Egypt, it was Moses’ prayers to the Lord that frequently caused the plagues to cease. (Exod 7:14) When the Amalekites attacked the Israelites in the wilderness, Moses went up the mountaintop and lifted up his hands in prayer. (Exod 17:8)

When the nation of Israel sinned greatly against the Lord by worshipping the golden calf, it was Moses, the intercessor, who spared them (32:7-14) He went back to Mount Sinai, and prayed to the Lord on behalf of the people. (Exod 32:30) When God smote Miriam with leprosy for criticising Moses, he was the one who prayed for her, and God healed her. (Num 12:1-16) At Kadesh-barnea, when the Jewish people had disobeyed God, by refusing to enter the Promised Land, Moses once again interceded on their behalf, and the Lord spared the people. (Num 14:1-21) When the Israelites were bitten by fiery serpents, it was the intercession of Moses that brought about healing. (Num 21:5-9)

It is interesting that Moses was the great intercessor. People criticised him. They complained about what he did. They took him for granted, and yet if it had not been for the prayers of Moses, where would the nation of Israel have been ? My we should not take the prayers of our families or our leaders for granted, for if we have praying parents and spiritual leaders, we have the answer to every problem and the provision for every need. Moses often prayed for others and God gave him what he requested. ***But not all of Moses’ prayers were answered.*** Indeed here, we see Moses making one particular request for himself, and the Lord refused to grant his petition. Can you see this old prayer warrior ?

Keil and Delitzsch suggest that the present incident occurred in the last of the forty years of wandering at the same place that the previous generation was judged. Israel’s forty years of wandering were at an end. From Egypt to the Red Sea, to Sinai, to Kadesh-barnea, and now to Jordan, Moses had led his people, and they now lie encamped on the side of Jordan ready to pass over into Canaan. ***Can you imagine the feelings that Moses must have had ?*** The work,

for which at the beginning, and many a time since, he had felt himself unable, had been brought to a successful consummation. The people were ready to pass over. The land that had been the goal of his labours, and the content of all his dreams lay just there, on the other side of the river. At the time of a past offence, Moses had been warned that neither he nor Aaron, would be permitted to bring the assembly into the land which God had given them. That word of the Lord came back to him now as he stood so near to the Promised Land. He could not bear the thought of not crossing over and the land with the triumphant people.

In his valedictory address he tells Israel of his prayer, which concludes with these words from the Lord, “ *thou shalt not go over this Jordan.* ” (3:27) Disappointed, but obedient, Moses encouraged Joshua, said farewell to his people, and then climbed Mount Nebo, unto the top of Pisgah. There with his raiment flowing in the winds, stood the man who had reached the great age of one hundred and twenty, but whose eye was not dim, nor his natural force abated. Can you see old Moses ? His undimmed eye sweeps the magnificent panorama which unfolds itself before him, the mountains to the north, here and there a peak that’s crowned with snow, the palms of Jericho, the plains, the rocky ravines, lakes, and perhaps in the far distant a gleam of the great sea. This was the land to which, under God he had brought this people, but God said “ *thou shalt not go over this Jordan.* ” Our subject this is “ ***When God said No,*** ” or “ ***The Problem of Unanswered Prayer.*** ” Now what I want to do this is look at the subject generally, and then towards the end of our study, look at the subject specifically as we focus in on Moses.

(1) DIVINE RESPONSES

God answers prayer ! The Word of God and our daily experiences in the life of faith teaches us, that this is so. But please remember that “ *yes,* ” is not the only answer.

Are you sure your prayers are not already answered ? Maybe the Lord has answered your prayer, but the real problem lies in us realising that the Lord did not answer, it in the way we expected. You see, the Lord responds to the prayers of His people in a number of ways. Sometimes,

(a) *God may answer “ Yes,”*

Do you remember godly Hannah ? How she longed for that child, and God gave to her Samuel, and she said,

“ *for this child I prayed, and the Lord hath given me my petition which I have asked of him.* ” (1 Sam 1:27) The psalmist could say, “ *the Lord hath heard my supplication, the Lord will receive my prayer.* ” (Ps 6:9) Solomon prayed for wisdom and the Lord gave him a wise and understanding heart. (1 Kings 3:9-12) Elijah on the top of Carmel’s heights cried, “ *Lord Let it be known this day that thou art God in Israel, and that I am thy servant,* ” *then the fire of the Lord fell.* ”

(1 Kings 18:38) Jonah in the depths of the ocean, in the fish’s belly said, “ *I cried by reason of mine affliction unto the Lord, and He heard me.* ” (2:2) So (a)

(b) God may answer “No,”

Many times we are like children who want to have some cheap toy right now, but like a good parent, our Heavenly Father does not give us what we want at the time because He has something far better planned for us. Your child asks for something sweet just before dinner and you reply “*No, it will take away your appetite for that which will do you far more good.*” Now does your child have any right to complain, “*Mummy does not love me for she did not give me what I asked ?*” Amy Carmichael recalls in her poem an experience that came to her when she was just three years old.

***“ Just a tiny little child, three years old
And a mother with a heart all of gold
Often did that mother say,
Jesus hears us when we pray
For He’s never far away
And He always answers***

***Now that tiny little child had brown eyes
And she wanted blue instead, like blue skies
She knew all her mother said was true
Jesus always answered***

***So she prayed for blue eyes, said goodnight
Went to sleep in deep content and delight
Woke up early by a chair, by a mirror, where, oh, where
Could those blue eyes be, Jesus hadn’t answered***

***Hadn’t answered her at all, never more could she pray
Her eyes were brown as before
Did a soft wind blow ?
Came a whisper soft and low
Jesus answered, He said, no
Isn’t no an answer.”***

Little did that three year old girl, with her brown eyes realise that God’s purpose lay for her in India. In India where she was to become the mother of thousands of unwanted temple children. In India, where she was to become an Indian. Now, have you ever met an Indian lady with blue eyes ? No, their eyes are always brown, and God gave her the eyes she needed. (a) (b)

(c) God may answer “Wait,”

You see, the request may be right but the timing may be wrong. When Lazarus was very ill, his sisters, Mary and Martha, sent for the Lord Jesus. However, the Lord deliberately waited to

come. When He finally arrived in Bethany, Lazarus had been in the grave for four days. You see, Christ purposely delayed in order to bring greater glory to God by raising this man from the dead.

(Jn 11:3, 39-40 2 Sam 7:1) In this case, the Lord delayed because the timing was not right for God's purposes to be fulfilled. *And sometimes the Lord delays in answering our prayers because His timing is different from ours.* George Muller that great man of prayer and faith, prayed for sixty years for the salvation of a friend. When Muller that man was still unsaved. But a few weeks after Muller's death he came to know the Lord.

You see, the Lord may answer (a) (b) (c) and,

(d) God may answer "Yes, but not your way,"

A Christian leaders wife, shortly before he died said,

"for a time I had to pray in the consciousness that God's power was still able to heal, then there came the quiet realisation that while the power was there, God's purposes were otherwise, so I asked other believers to pray that the Lord would take Him home." Moses prayed, *"Show me Thy glory."* (Exod 33:18) The Lord said, *"Yes, but not your way."* What I am trying to underscore is, that, God is sovereign, and He has the right to respond to our prayers in the way He deems best. (1 Jn 5:14-15)

***"I know not by what methods rare
But this I know, God answers prayer
I know not if the blessings sought
Will come in just the guise I thought
I leave my prayers to Him alone
Whose will is better than my own."***

So must never rule out the will of God in relation to our prayers, (1 Jn 5:14) yet the Scriptures teach that there are things that hinder prayer, that render prayer ineffectual. So we move from (1) to the,

(2) DIFFERENT REASONS

The barriers that hinder effectual prayer. Now in this context these unanswered prayers are not caused by God's inability to hear or to respond, but are the result of barriers that we have erected in our hearts. What, then are the barriers that cause our line of communication with the Lord to be severed ?

(a) SINFULNESS:

Do you recall the words of the psalmist ? *"If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me."* (66:18) The force of that verse is this, *"If I regard, hold dear, and tolerate unconfused sin in my heart, God will not listen."* The word *"regard,"* implies *"toleration, knowing and fostering sin and stubbornly refusing to confess it,"* this will cause our prayers to

go unanswered. My when we are regarding, or cherishing a known sin in our hearts, the Lord will not hear or answer us. *To cherish a sin means to practice it secretly, to think about it, to enjoy the memory of it, to be unwilling to face it honestly.* I wonder could this be the very reason why your prayers are unanswered ? Are you as a believer unwilling to renounce that known sin ? My do we realise that this has an effect upon us corporately ? Even in the field of evangelism ! For Isaiah's says, "*Behold the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save, neither His ear heavy that it cannot hear.*" Have you ever prayed that prayer when praying for someone to get saved ? Have you ever prayed it before a gospel service ?

Of course you have ! But I wonder is the second part of the verse the reason why our prayers go unanswered ?

" But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid His face from you, that He will not hear. " (Is 59:1-2) Is this the reason the lost are not being saved ? Is this why, the unsaved are not being touched ? Sin, in the lives of God's people !

(b) SELFISHNESS:

James says, "*Ye ask and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts.*" (4:3)

You see, its possible to pray for many good things for the wrong reason. Its possible to pray for the salvation of one's parents, or children because it would be so much nicer to live in a Christian home. Its possible to pray for the success of your church, your organisation, your missionary society, because that would enhance its stature. My what is your concern when you pray ? When you pray for the lost ? Your church, your home, your family, what is your concern ? Is your overriding concern the glory of God, regardless of what plans of yours might go astray ? (1 Cor 10:31) (a) (b)

(c) STINGINESS:

Yes, a lack of liberality towards the poor and the work of God is a hindrance to prayer ! The book of Proverbs says, "*Whoso stoppeth his ears at the cry of the poor, he also shall cry himself but shall not be heard.*"

(21:13) One of the most amazing statements about prayer is found in John's epistles ! (1 Jn 3:22) Do you know one of "*those things,*" that is pleasing in His sight ? Well, its found in the context. (3:16-17) George Muller was a mighty man of prayer, because he was a mighty giver to the work of God. He was constantly receiving because he was constantly giving. (Lk 6:38) The final barrier to answered prayer that I want to note is,

(d) STRIFE:

Where ? In the church ? No, but in the home ! Peter speaking to spouses says, "*Likewise ye husbands, dwell with according to knowledge, giving honour unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life, that your prayers be not hindered.*" (3:7) The word "*hindered,*" has an interesting meaning in the original. Its means to break up a road so that the army can't get through. In ancient warfare, this method was often used. *The*

soldiers would block the road with rocks, trees, and other barriers to prevent the opposing army from advance. Do you see what Peter is saying ? He is telling husbands and wives that if they don't get along with each other their prayers will be hindered. They will be putting up barricades and barriers along the road that will prevent the Lord from answering their prayers. Does domestic friction have an effect on our spiritual life ? Yes ! I wonder has someone ever walked into your home and caught you in the middle of a tiff ?

That happened to us one day. A preacher walked into our home and realised that we were having a little disagreement ! He then proceeded to ask me, “ *did you have your quiet time this morning ?* ” “ *Why yes,* ” I replied. He said, “ *Your wasting your time, your prayers only bounced off the wall.* ” Do you recall the Lord's words in (Matt 5:23) “ *If thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest,* ” What's the thing you remember when you get on your knees to pray ? What's the thing that jumps into your mind that makes you feel guilty ? Well, that's the hindering thing !

***“ Lord increase our faith today
Teach us how we ought to pray
Take all hindrances away
Lord, increase our faith.”***

(3) DENIED REQUESTS

Do you remember Elijah ? He was so discouraged that he came into the presence of the Lord and he said, “ *It is enough, now, O Lord, take away my life, for I am not better than my fathers.* ” (1 Kings 19:4) Isn't it a mercy that God does not answer all our prayers ! You see, the Lord did not take his life from, but gave his life back to him. Do you recall the prayer of the demoniac of

Gadara ? He besought the Lord Jesus that He might be with Him. But Christ denied his request, He said,

“ *Return to thine house and show how great things God hath done unto thee.* ” (Lk 8:39) Do you see Moses

here ? He, under God has brought the people to the very edge of the Promised Land, his dream is fulfilled, his objective is accomplished, so he comes before the Lord and says, “ *I pray thee, let me go over, and see the good land that is beyond Jordan.* ” (3:25) And God says,

“ *No.* ” Why ? Why was this simple request denied by God ? (Num 20:7-12) God's judgement upon Moses for his sin of striking the rock was that he would not take Israel into the land of Canaan. Now why was this sin so serious ? Because, it was the,

(a) SIN OF UNBELIEF:

Moses disobedience revealed his lack of faith in the power of God. You see, rather than trusting God to do what He said, Moses tried to rely on methods that had worked in the past. For this was not the first time that God had provided water from a rock. Do you remember what happened at Rephidim ? (Exod 17:1-7) You see, on this occasion, the Lord had

commanded Moses to strike the rock. *Now, instead of obeying the Lord's command to speak, Moses relied on his past experience and struck the rock twice.* While the Lord still kept His promise and gave them water from the rock, He made it clear to Moses that he had committed a serious sin. My because of unbelief, Moses missed getting into the Promised Land. Tell me, are their requests in your prayer that are being denied ? Is it because of sin in your heart ? What about the sin of unbelief ? Have you failed to take God at His Word ?

Moses sin of unbelief was serious in another respect. You see, this rock spoke of Christ. Paul says, “ *they drank of that spiritual rock that followed them, and that rock was Christ.* ” (1 Cor 10:4) This is plain and positive. It leaves no room whatever for the exercise of the imagination. “ ***That Rock was Christ,***” Christ smitten for us. Now this smiting could only take place once. The Lord had provided water from the rock on both occasions in order to give the people a picture of Jesus Christ, the Rock from which the living water of the Holy Spirit flows. It was an illustration of how Christ would be smitten once on the cross. My it is never to be repeated. “ *But now once in the end of the world hath He appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself so Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many.* ” (Heb 9:26-27) “ *For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God.* ” (1 Pet 3:18)

My the Rock had been struck once, and from that point on, it would not be necessary to strike the Rock again. ***Striking the rock speaks of Christ's death on the cross, speaking to the rock speaks of His heavenly ministry.*** We come to Him and He gives us what we need. You see, when Moses struck the rock, instead of speaking to it, he ruined the beautiful picture the Lord was seeking to portray. (a)

(b) SIN OF PRIDE:

Do you see what God says to Moses ? (Num 20:12)

Prior to this time, Moses had been a very meek and humble man. (Num 12:3) But his meekness disappeared at that instant. He temporarily forget that the purpose of leadership is to glorify God. He lost his temper and called the people rebels saying, “ *hear now ye rebels must we fetch you water out of this rock ?* ”

(20:10) He took the credit for the miracle, that God was about to perform, glorifying himself rather than the Lord. *Isn't it interesting to notice how many people in the Bible failed at the point where we would have considered them strongest ?* Moses was renown for his meekness, yet Satan used pride to cause him to stumble.

Abraham's great strength lay in his faith, but that's exactly where he failed. Twice he lied about his wife, Sarah. (Gen 12:10, 13:4 20:1) Do you recall David ?

His great strength lay in his integrity. He was a man after God's one heart. But he forgot his integrity and began to scheme in order to get Uriah's wife (2 Sam 11:1) Peter's great strength was his courage. But in his moment of testing, he denied knowing the Lord Jesus three times out of fear for his life. My watch out for that area that you consider to be your strongest !

(a) (b)

(c) SIN OF REBELLION:

Look at (Num 27:12-14) Of course, the people were partly to blame for Moses' sin. Like all leaders, Moses had been provoked at times by the children of Israel. The Psalmist speaking of this says, "*they angered him also at the waters of strife, so that it went ill with Moses for their sakes. Because they provoked his spirit, so that he spoke unadvisedly with his lips.*" (Ps 106:32-33) Sometimes the people of God create problems for the servant of God. That's why it so important for us to be patient with pastors, elders, and church leaders. We need to love and support them rather than complain about them and to them. My may we never be guilty of contributing to a persons fall into sin. (a) (b) (c)

(d) SIN OF ANGER:

For Moses allowed his personal feelings to surface at the rock of Meribah. The constant bickering of the Hebrews had worn him down, and he allowed his anger to rise to the surface. (Num 20:10) *Think of it, one moment of anger, one moment of disobedience, one moment of mistrust, one moment of frustration and doubt, and the price to pay, and the blessing he missed was great. Do you know something ? We need the Lord in our 40th year just as much as in our first.* We need the Lord at the end of our ministry, just as much as at the beginning. (d) A Texas pastor was scheduled to preach at a day conference. He was running late because his alarm had failed to ring. In his haste to make up for lost time, he cut himself while shaving. Then he found his shirt was not ironed. To make matters worse running to his car he noticed a tyre was flat. Disgusted, and by this time, distraught, the pastor finally got underway with a sudden burst of speed. Racing through town, he failed to notice a stop sign, and rushed through it. But there was a police car nearby, and in a few moments he heard the screen of a siren. Jumping out of his car, the agitated pastor said, "*well, go ahead, and gave me a ticket, everything else has gone wrong today.*" The policeman walked up and said quietly, "*Sir, I used to have days like that, before I became a Christian.*" Do you know the great apostle says ? "*Let all bitterness and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. And be ye kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you.*" (Eph 4:31-32)

WHEN GOD SAYS NO ! There's no doubt that Moses was a great servant of God, and what earthly blessing he missed by not entering into the Promised Land of Canaan was more than made up for when he entered into glory. But the fact remains that Moses missed out on his greatest dream on this earth. (Matt 17:1-3) *I wonder, how many blessings we miss out on, when we fail to obey God ?* What things could we have had in God, what ministry could we have exercised for God, that will be left on the table when this life is over ? Perhaps the Lord has someone waiting for you to be pass by, and tell about Christ, but because you were to tired, too busy, that someone will never come to know Christ, through your ministry. Perhaps the Lord has a work for you to do, a ministry that will bless the loves of others. But because you don't have the trust and faith in God that you should, that ministry will never happen. My what work remains on the table ? Will the thing that God calls you to do ever be accomplished ? It is said that the one place on earth that contains the most wealth is not Fort Knox, not the

Bank of England, its not the diamond mines of South Africa, nor the oil fields of the Middle East. *The one place on earth that holds the most wealth is the cemetery.* Why ?

The reason is that the cemetery holds all he wealth of unrealised dreams, un-reached goals, and unfulfilled lives. Businesses that were never started, ministries that just didn't happen, churches that were never built, and all because those people who are buried there failed to do, so many times, what God had called them to do. They chose to live a life of mediocrity, a life of an average person, rather than to step up, and be the man or woman of God that God wanted them to be. ***One act of disobedience cost Moses entrance into the Promised Land. What will you miss if you don't obey the Lord ?***