

Title: The Answer to our Prayers

Scripture: Acts 21: 3-35; 23: 11; 28: 30-31

Date: July 26, 2020

Place: SGBC, NJ

Subject: The Answer to our Prayers

Proposition: Having looked at Paul's prayer request concerning his visit to Jerusalem, now we will see that Christ answered each one but in his own way and in his own time.

Acts 21: 3: Now when we had discovered Cyprus, we left it on the left hand, and sailed into Syria, and landed at Tyre: for there the ship was to unlade her burden. **4:** And finding disciples, we tarried there seven days: who said to Paul through the Spirit, that he should not go up to Jerusalem...**10:** [at Caesarea in Philipps house] And as we tarried *there* many days, there came down from Judaea a certain prophet, named Agabus. **11:** And when he was come unto us, he took Paul's girdle, and bound his own hands and feet, and said, Thus saith the Holy Ghost, So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man that owneth this girdle, and shall deliver *him* into the hands of the Gentiles. **12:** And when we heard these things, both we, and they of that place, besought him not to go up to Jerusalem. **13:** Then Paul answered, What mean ye to weep and to break mine heart? for I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus. **14:** And when he would not be persuaded, we ceased, saying, The will of the Lord be done...**17:** And when we were come to Jerusalem, the brethren received us gladly. **18:** And the *day* following Paul went in with us unto James; and all the elders were present. **19:** And when he had saluted them, he declared particularly what things God had wrought among the Gentiles by his ministry. **20:** And when they heard *it*, they glorified the Lord, and said unto him, Thou seest, brother, how many thousands of Jews there are which believe; and they are all zealous of the law: **21:** And they are informed of thee, that thou teachest all the Jews which are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, saying that they ought not to circumcise *their* children, neither to walk after the customs. **22:** What is it therefore? the multitude must needs come together: for they will hear that thou art come. **23:** Do therefore this that we say to thee: We have four men which have a vow on them; **24:** Them take, and purify thyself with them, and be at charges with them, that they may shave *their* heads: and all may know that those things, whereof they were informed concerning thee, are nothing; but *that* thou thyself also walkest orderly, and keepest the law. **25:** As touching the Gentiles which believe, we have written *and* concluded that they observe no such thing, save only that they keep themselves from *things* offered to idols, and from blood, and from strangled, and from fornication. **26:** Then Paul took the men, and the next day purifying himself with them entered into the temple, to signify the accomplishment of the days of purification, until that an offering should be offered for every one of them.

27: And when the seven days were almost ended, the Jews which were of Asia, when they saw him in the temple, stirred up all the people, and laid hands on him, **28:** Crying out, Men of Israel, help: This is the man, that teacheth all *men* every where against the people, and the law, and this place: and further brought Greeks also into the temple, and hath polluted this holy place. **29:** (For they had seen before with him in the city Trophimus an Ephesian, whom they supposed that Paul had brought into the temple.) **30:** And all the city was moved, and the people ran together: and they took Paul, and drew him out of the temple: and forthwith the doors were shut.

If we preach the total depravity of all sinners in Adam then we will be accused of preaching *against the people*. If we preach Christ fulfilled the law for his people, that he is the end of the law for righteousness, that the believer is not under the law but under grace *then we will be accused of preaching against the law*. If we preach heavenly Mt Zion, heavenly Jerusalem, spiritual Israel made up of Jew and Gentile elect, that a true Jew is one circumcised in the heart, *then we will be accused of preaching against [their place]—natural Israel, natural Jews and natural religion*. If we receive sinners—justified and made holy by Christ alone—*then we will be accused of polluting their holy place*. Here is the problem sinners have with the gospel. The Lord Jesus said,

John 15: 22: If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin: but now they have no cloke for their sin. ...**24:** If I had not done among them the works which none other man did, they had not had sin: but now have they both seen and hated both me and my Father.

Acts 21: 31: And as they [the Jews] went about to kill him, tidings came unto the chief captain of the band, [the Romans] that all Jerusalem was in an uproar. 32: Who immediately took soldiers and centurions, and ran down unto them: and when they saw the chief captain and the soldiers, they left beating of Paul. 33: Then the chief captain came near, and took him, and commanded *him* to be bound with two chains; and demanded who he was, and what he had done. 34: And some cried one thing, some another, among the multitude: and when he could not know the certainty for the tumult, he commanded him to be carried into the castle. 35: And when he came upon the stairs, so it was, that he was borne of the soldiers for the violence of the people.

Paul asked the Romans to pray that he would be delivered from those who did not believe in Jerusalem—the Lord did it—but how?—by having Paul arrested and cast into jail. Now, let's go to chapter 23. As Paul was in jail, one night the Lord appeared to comfort and assured Paul.

Acts 23: 11: And the night following the Lord stood by him, and said, Be of good cheer, Paul: for as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome.

In Romans 15 they prayed that Paul might be delivered to Rome by the will of God. The Lord did so. But the Lord shuffled Paul back and forth between rulers and kings and judges—Jew and Roman. The Lord had Paul carried on a long journey over land and sea under armed guard over a long period of time. The Lord even sent a hurricane and shipwrecked Paul on the island of Melita along the way—because Paul was to preach the gospel there. But at last the Lord delivered him to Rome. Now, let's go to chapter 28.

Acts 28: 30: And Paul dwelt two whole years in his own hired house, and received all that came in unto him, 31: Preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding him...[look up to] 24 And some believed the things which were spoken, and some believed not.

Subject: The Answer to our Prayers

Proposition: God answers our prayers but not always in the way we expect or want

GOD'S WILL IN PRAYER

The Lord Jesus Christ hears and answers our prayers. But he does so according to his will.

God delivers us from unbelievers though not in the way we expected. He causes his people to receive us as brethren. Though it is often different than the way we hoped or expected. He delivers us wherever *he will* have us preach the gospel. But the journey may be in quiet another way than we had thought it would be.

Isaiah 55:8: For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith 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.

That is so much better for us because scripture says

Ephesians 3:20 [he] is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us,

God moves in a mysterious way
His wonders to perform;
He plants His footsteps in the sea
And rides upon the storm.

Deep in unfathomable mines
Of never-failing skill
He treasures up His bright designs,
And works His sovereign will.

Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take;

The clouds you so much dread
Are big with mercy and will break
With blessings on your head.

His purposes will ripen fast,
Unfolding every hour;
The bud may have a bitter taste,
But sweet will be the flower.

Blind unbelief is sure to err
And scan His works in vain;
God is His own interpreter.
And He will make it plain.

But whatever he does this is certain, concerning those he foreknew, those he predestinated, those he called, those he justified:

Romans 8: 28: And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.

Therefore we must trust and wait on the Lord.

AN EVER-PRESENT HELP

As the Lord answers our prayer we can be assured the Lord is an ever-present help to the believer in all our trouble. He came to Paul and comforted him. He does the same to us through the gospel.

Trouble will come from those who reject this gospel of free grace. Our Lord tells us to expect it. The servant is not greater than his lord. Self-righteous, self-willed, sinners rejected Christ. So Christ tells us to expect that they shall reject us.

He makes us suffer in like manner as he suffered. Much of Paul's trouble bears a resemblance, in a much lighter way, to what our Lord suffered. They accused Christ of preaching against the people. Paul was accused of the same. We should expect it. But our Lord Jesus did not come to condemn the world. He came that his elect scattered all over the world might be saved. We were already condemned by our fall in Adam. Christ came that we might have life and that we might have it more abundantly through his blood and righteousness.

The Lord was accused of preaching against the law. So was Paul. The accusation is still aimed at believers in our day. Yet, Christ came not to destroy the law but to fulfill it. He did so by paying the wages his brethren could not pay which is eternal death. So Christ Jesus redeemed each one of his elect from the curse of the law. We are dead to the law. Therefore the law has nothing else to say to a believer. But dead sinners will accuse you of preaching against the people and against the law

The angry mob falsely accused Christ. They did so to Paul. Therefore you and I should expect the same. But remember,

Psalm 46: 1: God is our refuge and strength A VERY PRESENT HELP IN TROUBLE. 2: Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea;

As we see Christ standing by the apostle Paul to comfort him, in every time of trouble, *know the Lord Jesus is near*—pray to the Lord Jesus casting all your burden on him. For his sake, for the love of the Spirit pray for one another. Ask the Lord's will be done because Christ promises:

Psalm 109:31:...he shall stand at the right hand of the poor, to save him from those that condemn his soul.

NO DISCOURAGEMENT

As we see the Lord answer Paul's prayer do not be discouraged when God's providence appears to be working opposite of what you ask. Trust the Lord's promise. In all our difficulties and trials, Christ is teaching us to trust him, not ourselves.

Proverbs 3:5: Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. 6 In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.

Paul was rejected by men, falsely charged, arrested, carted all over land and sea under armed guard and thrown in a dark jail cell. But it was all under Christ's control on purpose to answer Paul's prayer. The Lord was teaching Paul again what he taught him in Asia; this is what he teaches us:

2 Corinthians 1: 8: For we would not, brethren, have you ignorant of our trouble which came to us in Asia, that we were pressed out of measure, above strength, insomuch that we despaired even of life: 9: But we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God which raiseth the dead: 10: Who delivered us from so great a death, and doth deliver: in whom we trust that he will yet deliver *us*; 11: Ye also helping together by prayer for us, that for the gift *bestowed* upon us by the means of many persons thanks may be given by many on our behalf.

Jeremiah 15:20: And I will make thee unto this people a fenced brasen wall: and they shall fight against thee, but they shall not prevail against thee: for I am with thee to save thee and to deliver thee, saith the LORD.

Not only does the Lord answer in his way, the Lord may wait a long time before he takes you out of the fire. But remember when the Mary and Martha sent word to the Lord—*"he whom thou lovest is sick."*

John 11: 5: Now Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus. 6 When he had heard therefore that he was sick, he abode two days still in the same place where he was.

He waits to help us for the same reason he waited to help them,

John 11: 4: When Jesus heard [he] said, This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby.

Brethren, whatever the trial, though it may appear opposite to what we asked God to do, though it may be a long time in coming, bow to his will; trust him and wait on him. Christ alone is anointed to "open the prison to them that are bound." There is no trial except what he brings to pass. There is no difficulty that can change his purpose of grace to us. He says, "I know the thoughts that I think towards you; thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end." Remember that!

ACCOMPLISHING CHRIST'S PURPOSE

Acts 23: 11: And the night following the Lord stood by him, and said, Be of good cheer, Paul: for as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome.

Remember, Christ is using his people to accomplish his purpose. The Lord saves sinners to save other sinners. Our Lord comforts the believer to comfort other believers.

2 Corinthians 1: 3:...the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort; 4 Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God. 5 For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ.

After every trial, I have had fresh comfort wherewith to comfort others. Trials give us more knowledge of Christ and his ways. Trials give us more grace such as forbearance, longsuffering, love, mercy, forgiveness. Everything God has ever done for me—preserving me through every trial—is so I can stand here and bear witness, saying, "Sirs, be of good cheer: for I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me."

He called you out of darkness into his light because he justified you by his blood. He must do the same for the rest of his lost sheep. Therefore he will not let you go because he will not let them go. We are the grip of his sovereign hand and his precious blood under his immutable promise:

John 14: 18: I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you. 19:...because I live, ye shall live also. 20: At that day ye shall know that I am in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you.

Isaiah 43: 1: But now thus saith the LORD that created thee, O Jacob, and he that formed thee, O Israel, Fear not: for I have redeemed thee, I have called *thee* by thy name; thou *art* mine. 2: When thou passest through the waters, I *will be* with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee. 3: For I *am* the LORD thy God, the Holy One of Israel, thy Saviour: I gave Egypt *for* thy ransom, Ethiopia and Seba for thee. 4: Since thou wast precious in my sight, thou hast been honourable, and I have loved thee: therefore will I give men for thee, and people for thy life. 5 Fear not: for I *am* with thee: I will bring thy seed from the east, and gather thee from the west; 6 I will say to the north, Give up; and to the south, Keep not back: bring my sons from far, and my daughters from the ends of the earth; 7 *Even* every one that is called by my name: for I have created him for my glory, I have formed him; yea, I have made him.

Amen!