

Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

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Dear Friends,

We could not find a passage anywhere in the Bible that documents a prayer request and almost immediate fulfillment. As I wrote this week's Gleanings article, a thought kept ringing in my mind. If we think of things that we truly need for our life, things that drive us to prayer, can you think of a single legitimate need that, should the Lord fulfill your request, would not also glorify Him? Put your life needs and the things that appear in your prayers to this test. If you truly need it, should the Lord answer your prayer and provide it, would He be glorified by it?

This reflection might help us sort out what we "Need" in contrast with what we "Want," but likely do not truly need. A spoiled child may request all kinds of things that he/she doesn't honestly need. To grant such a request tends to further spoil the child.

Many years ago a business associate who believed in the "Health and wealth" philosophy of Christianity gave me a small booklet, "The Prayer of Jabez." It was a brief article supposedly drawn from an Old Testament verse.

And Jabez called on the God of Israel, saying, Oh that thou wouldst bless me indeed, and enlarge my coast, and that thine hand might be with me, and that thou wouldst keep me from evil, that it may not grieve me! And God granted him that which he requested. (1Ch 4:10 KJV)

The article interpreted Jabez petition as relating to Jabez's personal interest and gain. The man who gave the article to me openly stated his belief that all we need to do to become independently wealthy is to pray that prayer, and God will grant it. The more I study Jabez's request of the Lord the more I see this godly man asking the Lord for things that would wisely draw him closer to the Lord, not necessarily to his banker or his investment broker. To my disappointment, the time came when I observed this man grievously ignore Biblical ethics and do some questionable things, all calculated to gain more wealth for himself. He gained a few extra dollars in the process, but he also destroyed his Christian witness with me. He managed to prove to me that he regarded personal gain higher than honoring God with Biblical ethics in his business practices.

My study of Scriptures, beginning in Genesis, on answered prayers has given me more joyful conviction in the Lord's teaching in Scripture on true prayer than I've ever realized before the study. Could God choose to give or withhold blessings in our lives, whether we pray or not? I suppose He could. Could He choose to give or withhold blessings whether we pray for each other or not? Yes, He could. However, if we follow the teaching of Scripture, He repeatedly teaches us by a multitude of examples that He has chosen to share the process of blessing us with His faithful followers who believe Him and who believe what He teaches us in Scripture. Thank you, Lord! In this process, the Lord shares His beyond-human-understanding-joy with us, if we trust and believe Him and what He has taught us in His Book. Experience some of this joy. Go to Him on your knees, truly believing Him and His word in Scripture, and pray for your life's journey, for your friends, and especially for your church and your church family. You can't imagine the joy you'll realize when you see His loving hand reach out right before your eyes and bring your request to pass.

Lord bless, Joe Holder

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Apostles' Prayer Answered

And when they heard that, they lifted up their voice to God with one accord, and said, Lord, thou art God, which hast made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all that in them is: Who by the mouth of thy servant David hast said, Why did the heathen rage, and the people imagine vain things? The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord, and against his Christ. For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together, For to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done. 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. 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. ([Ac 4:24-31](#) KJV 1900)

It has been said that the Book of Acts is *to* believers after the first century, but only *for* those first century believers. I am inclined to agree. The first generation of believers performed many miracles that simply do not occur in our day, or since that day, for that matter. If you carefully document the precise form of speaking in tongues in [Ac 2](#), speaking in tongues, as those men spoke, does not occur today. Modern “Tongue-speaking” does not resemble what the apostles did. They did not speak in an unknown language. Quite the opposite, the miracle of their speech on Pentecost was that they spoke in their native language, Galilean, but men from seventeen different cultures—and languages—heard that speech, each simultaneously in his own native language. My native language is English. True Biblical Pentecost tongues would mean that I speak in English, and, as I speak, a believer who speaks and understands German hears my words as if I spoke German, and another believer who speaks French hears my words in French, while a third believer who speaks Greek hears as if I spoke in Greek. The Holy Spirit provided miraculous simultaneous translation from one *known* human language, Galilean, into seventeen other *known* human languages. I’ve heard very sincere believers who believe in modern tongues describe their experience and belief, but what they described didn’t at all match what [Ac 2:5-11](#) describes. Because of the miracle the Spirit empowered that day, no translator or interpreter was needed. The Spirit provided immediate translation from one *known* human language (Galilean, per [Ac 2:7](#)) into seventeen, counting “Jews and proselytes,” other *known* human languages. ([Ac 2:8-11](#))

Further, if we examine [Ac 5:1-10](#), another miracle occurred, but not so desirable in this case. Peter, spokesman and likely acting as leader/pastor of the Jerusalem Church at the time, confronts a husband and wife for lying regarding what they gave to the church treasury. And each of them died on the spot. How many pastors have you known with such powers? Not a one, and thankfully so.

The point could be repeated many times throughout Acts. The Spirit gave us Acts to demonstrate His power and the fact that He regarded the beginnings of the gospel church as a serious matter, not to be taken lightly. In an age when so many professing Christians work at “Dumbing down” the Bible to suit their personal philosophies of the faith, believers need the reminder of the Spirit’s gravity in establishing the beginning of the new way of worship and living to the glory of God *His way*.

After healing the man at the Beautiful Gate, Peter and John were questioned and threatened by the Jewish temple leaders before being released. Upon their release, they went directly to the church, “*their own company*,” ([Ac 4:23](#)) and reported all that had happened. Our study passage begins at that point. As soon as the “company,” heard their report, they praised God and prayed. They didn’t imagine a dark conspiracy against them or respond in paranoid suspicion. No need, they had God on their side with power and grace. If the Lord protected and empowered them, why fear any mortal man or his evil designs? When I hear conspiracists talk about their suspicions, I often think of a wise cliché I heard many years ago. When a man fears man, he fears everything else as well. When a man fears God, he fears nothing else! Perhaps the right answer to endless conspiracy paranoia is to teach people more about fearing God. God gives us a simple, and fail-safe filter in Scripture. “...*for whatsoever is not of*

faith is sin.” (Ro 14:23b) Is your fear of what a supposed conspiracist might do of faith? No. It more represents everything that opposes faith than supports it. Is it “From above”? No. It is more from below. So why do you enslave yourself to it and its imagined evil designs? This mindset is a faith-killer and a joy-thief. If He who dwells in you is greater than he that dwells in this world, why do you enslave yourself and your fears to this world and its imaginations? Trust God to be God! Every ounce of your personal mental energy that you give to your conspiracy ideas is energy you cannot give to God! Who deserves your energy? Give it to Him.

After praising the Lord for His grace and protection, the church prayed.

*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.*

For what did they pray? They asked the Lord to grant them the grace and boldness to speak the word of God, despite the threats of the temple leaders. They also prayed for grace to accomplish healing, supernatural “*signs and wonders*” that would affirm the “name” and Person of Jesus as the power behind these miracles. They didn’t pray for a single personal benefit from the gospel. Everything they asked the Lord to give related to Jesus and His glory. No, the Lord does not forbid us praying for personal needs. However, when personal needs compete with things that glorify Jesus, we should find no problem asking the Lord to glorify Jesus.

*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**.* They prayed “*that with all boldness they may speak thy word.*” And what does Luke report happened following their prayer? “*...they spake the word of God with boldness.*” The Lord almost immediately and specifically answered their prayer! Is it any wonder they praised God? You see, in this lesson, a powerful reminder from the Lord. When His people pray to Him in faith, believing in Him and His goodness, He answers their prayers. When His children go through empty motions of praying, while thinking that He does not—indeed, cannot—answer prayers, He has no reason to answer such a prayer if we can even call such an utterance a prayer at all. No better example of self-fulfilling prophecy could be offered. The Lord shall never answer a faithless, unbelieving prayer.

When you pray for something especially important in your life, what do you do afterwards? Do you forget your prayer and go back to life as usual? Including perhaps working your hardest to make that desired thing a reality by your own effort? Or do you truly leave the matter in the Lord’s hand and ask Him to guide you to His assignment for you relating to that end? These men had no control over the Lord’s power to give them boldness in their preaching. They prayed, and then simply made themselves available for His use, should He answer their prayer. And He did. If we pray for something, however earnestly or sincerely, but immediately start working our hardest to make it happen ourselves, are we really trusting the Lord to whom we prayed? Or are we going through the motions of prayer, but trusting ourselves and our own efforts?

The bad habit is oh so easy to follow. We freely give the Lord our problems when we pray, but how often, as we end our prayer and stand up, do we grab those problems, and stuff them right back into our life’s backpack, as if we never mentioned them to the Lord? If you give the Lord your problems because you can’t deal with them, leave them with Him when you arise from that prayer. If you couldn’t deal with them before, can you deal with them now? And if you can’t deal with them, why load down your life with them? Give to the Lord, yes. Leave them with the Lord? By all means!

Much of the self-worship pretense of faith in our day puts all the focus of prayer on convincing God to give us what we want, often for our self-indulgence. The teaching is not labelled “Health and wealth” without a reason. Does God answer the prayers of His people? Indeed, He does. Does He give us

permission to lay our hearts open before Him? Yes, He does. However, the most frequent examples of answered prayer in Scripture remind us that the Lord answers prayers that reach outside ourselves and ask His help for others. And, in the case of our study passage, the church prayed for themselves, but to what end? They prayed that the Lord would give them boldness to speak the gospel with power for His glory, not for any personal gain to themselves.

Consider the broad cultural trend of Bible-believing Christianity in this country. Across the various theological and denominational lines, all conservative denominations are in decline. The only groups that show significant growth are rather aberrant groups. I presume that my primary audience is conservative, Bible-believing Christians. Do you believe the Lord can turn this alarming trend around? I do. How much time do you devote in your prayers asking the Lord to do just that, for His glory and not for our gain? When you pray in this manner, do you honestly believe from your heart that the Lord is able to answer your prayer? If so, what are you doing in your daily life that harmonizes with that belief? How faithful are you to your personal faith? To the faith of your church? Do you invest in your home church, but constantly look for “Greener pastures” elsewhere? Or do you invest, believing the Lord shall revive you, your faith, and your church?

Does your church need more ministers? How much time have you devoted in prayer to this need during the last month? Year? Jesus taught the disciples—and us—when we become aware of a lack of laborers, we should pray for them. Do not miss His point. “*Laborers*” is far broader than preachers! How much effort have you invested in personal “Kingdom” *labor* during the last month? Year?

Elder Joe Holder