

2008 11-26 When God answers prayer, Phil. 4:6-20 (Thanksgiving)

When is the last time God has answered your prayer? You may not remember. Or you may keep track of God's answers with precision. If you recorded all the times you prayed and then went back and jotted down all God's answers to prayer, then you would see how thankful we really need to be on this thanksgiving.

Paul urges the Phillipians to pray with thanksgiving as they make requests. So what would likely happen is that God would answer their prayers and then they would pray a second prayer of thanksgiving when they received what they asked for.

I think we could all use a little more thanksgiving in our prayers, instead most of the time we are just asking for things in prayer. Many times God gives us what we ask for, yet we never thank him for it after words.

This is much like the lepers in the Gospel reading. They were all about asking Jesus to heal them, but after he did, only one returned to say thank you. Kind of sad, that there was only one.

I would say those statistics are quite similar today. Everyone is asking for things in their prayer, but only about ten percent recognize that they received something. And the danger here is not only that we often don't thank God, but also it creates a weakening of our faith.

Many times we commend ourselves for receiving good things because of our hard work, our skillful strategy, and our outstanding intellect. But God is not in the picture, and our tendency is to slide into self pride and looking for our own recognition.

All this because we failed to see that God gave us what we asked for. For this same reason we often pray less when things are going good. We don't need anything so God tends to fall out of the picture.

But then when the hard times come we are all about seeking God and looking to him. Yet the cycle continues after we come out of the hard times. God grants us relief from our problem, but we fail to thank him and just keep on going with no thanks to God.

Consider the Israelites who were slaves in Egypt. They cried out to God because they were in such terrible slavery. They were going through hard times. God heard their cry, he sent Moses and they were free from Egypt headed for the promised land.

Then they failed to thank God. They failed to thank God for his incredible deliverance. Instead they complained about the desert journey, not understanding the blessings of God's plan.

For forty years they complained not remembering or thanking God for the gifts he gave and was going to give them in the future.

It was unfortunate that the Israelites forgot about God because God tried to help them remember. He gave them the Passover meal so they could remember their deliverance. He had them eat bitter herbs so they could remember the bitter slavery they were in. He had them eat unleavened bread because they had to hurry up and leave Egypt. They didn't have time to let the dough rise as they prepared the meal. And of course he had them slaughter the lamb just like they did on that night when they had to put the blood from the Lamb on the door posts so that the angel of death would pass over them. That is why it was called the Passover.

Maybe if God had to do it all over again he would have had that meal more than once a year. Well you know what, he did. He did it all over again except this time he sacrificed the Lamb Jesus on the Cross.

This was the blood that the blood on the door post actually foreshadowed. Christ's blood delivers us from the angel of death who is Satan. Satan can no longer send us to eternal death because of Jesus has forgiven us all our sins. He has died in our place, and his blood is smeared on the door that stops us from going to hell.

God's meal for you to remember is the Eucharist which means thanksgiving. You will partake of his actual body and blood and remember what Christ did for you. He died on the cross for you. And this meal God encourages us to receive more than once a year, in fact maybe as often as we possibly can.

He asks us to do this in remembrance of him because it is easy to forget to thank God. Not just because we are sinners, but because sometimes we don't receive a positive answer to prayer. Sometimes the answer is no. Sometimes the answer is wait. Sometimes the answer is wait for a really long time.

It's hard to thank God when you lose your Job. It's hard to thank God when you lose your house. It's hard to thank God when you lost a loved one.

I remember a woman who was pregnant and was in terrible despair. Her water broke and she would have to deliver early. Sadly the baby's lungs were not developed enough. The hospital told her to give up because the baby would never live. Frustrated with this diagnosis, she went to a different hospital with different doctors. This new hospital said the babies chance of survival was about 10 percent.

There was a glimmer of hope for ten days, but then the baby died. Now thanksgiving was approaching and they sat around the table with all the turkey and the whole family, but no baby as they had expected to have.

The mother of the child did not despair though because she remembered Christ death on the cross. She remembered he was tortured and died a terrible death. And she thanked God for that. She thanked God that he promised heaven by his grace.

She believed her child was in heaven even though she had missed the chance to baptize him. She knew that her baby died for a reason because Jesus died for a reason too. It wasn't the happiest thanksgiving, in fact it was the saddest, but the important thing is that she was still thankful.

So we also remember, no matter if our year was good or bad, that Jesus died for us. We remember that as we eat and drink tonight. And we remember as we continue to pray, as we continue to pray with thanksgiving. Amen.

