

210425 Prayer for Special Blessing Answered 38/16 April 25, 2021

Dear Friends,

Over the years I've occasionally heard people voice bewilderment at why the Lord pours out a blessing on one day and seemingly withholds blessings on another. Blesses one believer and not another. They seem to think that the Lord's administration of His blessings is random and without purpose. In this thinking, they are so wrong. In Scripture the Lord promises to send blessings to His people, conditioned on their faith and their faithful obedience. When His people turn the deaf ear to Him and His ways, they effectively tell Him they are not interested in His blessings. And He will not send them to people with that attitude.

When the Lord's people immerse their minds and their lives in the Lord and His ways, striving to serve, not be served, blessings are sure to follow. Blessings supply our needs and strengthen our hearts toward the Lord. They also change us. They feed the soul and help us grow stronger in our faith and in our faith-walk.

Look in the mirror of Scripture. Take full notice of the image you see of yourself--as you are, not as you wish to be or as you imagine yourself to be. Now turn your examination in the mirror to the image of Jesus that you see in this mirror. Put your image of Him immediately beside the image you see of yourself. Do you see any differences? Oh yes! If we truly long for the Lord's poured-out blessings in our lives and in our churches, we will work long and hard to reshape that image we see of ourselves, ever more into the image we see of Jesus.

Today is an ideal time for this transformation to begin. Are you willing to dare to make the comparison of the two images you see in that Bible mirror?

Lord bless, Joe Holder

Prayer for Special Blessing Answered

Now when the apostles which were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John: Who, when they were come down, prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Ghost: (For as yet he was fallen upon none of them: only they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.) Then laid they their hands on them, and they received the Holy Ghost. ([Ac 8:14-17](#) KJV 1900)

When Jesus gave the eleven His last charge prior to ascending back to heaven, He revealed a simple map of the spread of the gospel from Jerusalem.

But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth. ([Ac 1:8](#))

In one verse, Jesus gave them an outline of events recorded in the Book of Acts. If you look at a map of the Fertile Crescent in the first century, and read Jesus' words to the eleven, you could depict what he said by drawing an ever-expanding outward spiral line. The gospel was first preached in Jerusalem after Jesus ascended. ([Ac 2](#); Day of Pentecost) Within a few chapters in Acts, we read of the gospel spreading out from Jerusalem into other cities in Judea. Our study passage records the first post-resurrection preaching of the gospel to Samaritans. From there, it would begin reaching out to Gentiles; first Cornelius, an officer in the Roman army. ([Ac 10](#)) In [Ac 13](#), the apostles finally announced to unbelieving Jews that they were shifting their focus of preaching from them to the Gentiles. ([Ac 13:46](#)) Whenever a people knowingly choose their own ways and ideas over God's ways and truth, as revealed in Scripture, the Lord will send His preachers elsewhere, leaving them to their own empty religious forms.

The special “Signs,” exceptional manifestations of the power of the Holy Spirit who accompanied and guided the spread of the gospel, were intended to add powerful convincing weight to the words and preaching of the men who preached along this path. The Lord never intended them to be permanent accompaniments to the preaching of the gospel.

Now when the apostles which were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John. Even with a credible report of the Samaritans believing the gospel, the eleven, who were still lingering in Jerusalem, sought confirmation. They sent Peter and John to verify the news and to encourage those who were preaching in that region.

Because of the cultural animosity between Jews and Samaritans, the idea of the gospel spreading to Samaritans and them believing it, was likely fully as difficult for those Jewish believers as the idea of Gentiles believing. If you study Peter’s detailed defense of his preaching to the house of Cornelius and their believing it to the apostles and church in Jerusalem ([Ac 11](#)), it appears that even they struggled intensely with the idea. However, when they realized that the Lord had blessed the work and those Gentiles, they accepted it and rejoiced.

I do not suggest that either the apostles or Jerusalem Church disbelieved the report that the gospel had been believed by Samaritans, a point that nothing in the passage supports. We should always avoid imposing our imagination onto a passage. For example, have you ever heard someone ask—or asked the question yourself—“What would have happened if Adam and Eve didn’t eat the forbidden fruit?” We can wax eloquent and philosophical, but factually we can’t answer a word to the question without indulging our carnal imagination, for Scripture never mentions a single word that would answer that question.

The Jerusalem Church and the apostles followed a sound practice that Paul later would include in his inspired letter to the Thessalonians.

Prove all things; hold fast that which is good. (1Th 5:21)

The more I ponder the reaction of many very sincere, but sadly undisciplined believers during the “Year of COVID” the more I believe they/we all need to rethink and affirm our belief in this Biblical principle. How much imagination, rumor, and paranoia (“They are using COVID to...to us”) has been spread and believed as if “Proven fact”? As I ponder the carnal politicization of the virus by all political parties, I believe more strongly than ever. We need to reject all political sophistry regarding the virus and consult our personal physician. Listen to him/her alone regarding this virus and what we should do or not do to protect ourselves and those close to us whom we love from it. It sounds so simple, but so many people have allowed the political rhetoric to confuse their thinking. They refuse to consult their doctor, choosing the unproved and unsupported fantasies that spread like wildfire about the virus. Example. My youngest daughter is a second-grade teacher. A fellow teacher complained to her that she had no intention of getting the vaccine for fear that “They” would also inject a computer chip into her arm and would be able to “Follow” her. My daughter laughed and asked, “Do you have a cell phone? A tablet?” “They” have no need to inject a chip in your arm. “They” already know everything they want to know about you. Further, if you are an honest, godly, and law-abiding person, why would you care? While Paul was under house arrest in Rome, he was likely constantly chained to a Roman soldier. That soldier, and therefore the Roman government, “Knew” everything Paul said and everyone who visited him. Did he ever act as if he cared? His godly faith and his transparent conduct, in fact, converted several of those soldiers to the faith! ([Php 4:22](#)) Why not hope “They” do want to track us? Maybe our godly lifestyle might convert some of them to the faith of Jesus! Bring it on! Imitate Paul!

Who, when they were come down, prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Ghost: (For as yet he was fallen upon none of them: only they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.) Upon seeing the evidence that the Lord had opened the gospel to Samaritans, the two visitors from Jerusalem

rejoiced and prayed for those Samaritans. They specifically prayed “...*that they might receive the Holy Ghost.*” This prayer likely refers to something similar to the unique outpouring of the Holy Spirit on Jewish believers on the Day of Pentecost, immediately after Jesus’ ascension. ([Ac 2](#)) They could not have prayed for anything more specific in that setting. What do we read immediately following this prayer?

Then laid they their hands on them, and they received the Holy Ghost. As with our last study, we see in this lesson another example of an immediate answer to the prayer of godly people. Not only did the Lord answer the prayer, He answered almost immediately. In both cases, the prayer asked the Lord to affirm His word, truth, and gracious care to His people. When did we last pray such a prayer?

While we do not see the unusual and miraculous manifestations of the Holy Spirit today that we read about in Acts (Those manifestations were unique to that time and need), when the Lord’s people devote themselves to the Lord and His gospel more than to themselves, He still responds in ways that convince us of His approval and blessing.

Think about your church and its present state. When did you last see the power of God strongly manifested in a meeting? Larger than normal numbers of people in attendance? People becoming convicted of the truth and stepping up with their confession of faith in Jesus and their desire to be baptized? Not recently? If you were to describe in one brief paragraph your personal spiritual activity over the last year, what would it be? How much of that paragraph would describe your praying as these men prayed? No? If not, you really have no basis on which to expect the Lord’s special outpouring, do you? What has been your activity toward your church over the last year? Criticize the church, the deacons, or the pastor? Make sure you told as many people as would listen how unhappy you were? If so, on what Biblical basis do you have any reason to expect a spiritual outpouring? Have you recently read Proverbs and Solomon’s reminders of just how strongly the Lord dislikes His children criticizing or speaking ill of each other? Such conduct predicts His chastening and withdrawal, never His outpoured blessings. Never. If we judged a person’s belief by their conduct, we might conclude that some folks truly think they are not being faithful unless they are complaining or criticizing about something. Did they ever read [Ps 144:14b](#), “...*that there be no complaining in our streets*”?

When did you last experience a unique blessing from the Lord? Within the last month? Six months? Year? Or can you recall? If our memory is so vague, the problem may well be our spiritual state. The Lord is never so slack in the pouring out of His blessings. If we are wisely focused on the Lord, can we think through a single day when we were not blessed in some special way? Not a one!

Many years ago a pastor told me an instructive experience. After church one Sunday, a leading member approached him, “Elder, I fear that something is wrong. It seems that you are not preaching with the same power as when you first became our pastor.” The pastor responded, “Are you praying for me now as you did then?” The man felt deep conviction. The next Sunday after the service that same man approached the pastor in tears, “Something was wrong, and it was me. Your words convicted me, and I prayed all week for your message today. My prayer was answered.”

We need to invest in reforming our bonds of love and fellowship with our local church and pastor. After a year of isolation and social disruption, we have forgotten, or at least become “Rusty” in our godly fellowship skills. The man’s praying experience reminds us. How much time last week did you devote to praying for your church? For your pastor? Or did you merely take them both for granted? James reminds us. Our primary assignment from the Lord is not to serve as the church’s or pastor’s chief critic. It is rather to spend serious time looking in the mirror at ourselves, praying, “Lord, I need reform. Show me the way.”

The harmony and spiritual focus we see in our study passage must prevail in a church before the flood of blessings we read about in the Samaritan believers falls on us. If we care enough to long for that

blessing, we must faithfully practice the example of those who prayed for extraordinary blessings and lived in faith that fostered and nurtured the blessing when it came.

Elder Joe Holder