

210502 Peter's Answered Prayer and Tabitha

Dear Friends,

When the Lord makes major "Administrative" (Perhaps the normal Christianized word is "Dispensational") changes in how He directs His people to serve Him, He always accompanies that season with special miracles. Consider the miracles related to Moses on Mt. Sinai where God gave Him the Ten Commandments and directed him to construct the tabernacle and its furnishings. The New Testament Book of Acts records the season immediately following the Lord's changing the worship of His people from Old Testament and pre-Jesus' resurrection, to New Testament and post-Jesus' resurrection. So Acts effectively documents the Lord's exceptional outpouring of special grace and events to affirm that the change was His will and commandment, one that He would bring to pass.

We should not expect the Lord to raise someone back to life after they have died, but we can pray for and believe that the Lord will surely grant special blessings to strengthen us and his people, and to confirm His blessings in our lives, especially in our present circumstances.

What can we learn from such events in the New Testament? We can learn that our God is tenderly involved in our lives, and that sincere prayer for events that will give glory and honor to Him tend to be answered. Can we pray with that faith?

In the season we now experience, we need this godly example far more than in our normal seasons. Many believers have formed bad habits of mind and action. We need powerful reminders of the Lord's kind grace that refreshes our memory of Him and of His ways. We need these reminders to help us break our bad habits and resume godly faith walking that seeks His honor, not our own.

Lord help us, Joe Holder

Peter's Answered Prayer and Tabitha

But Peter put them all forth, and kneeled down, and prayed; and turning him to the body said, Tabitha, arise. And she opened her eyes: and when she saw Peter, she sat up. And he gave her his hand, and lifted her up, and when he had called the saints and widows, presented her alive. And it was known throughout all Joppa; and many believed in the Lord. ([Ac 9:40-42](#) KJV 1900)

In an earlier Gleanings I mentioned that Acts is for us, for our knowledge and edification, but it is not **to** us. Our present passage stands out as one of the clearest to make that point. Tabitha died, and several disciples witnessed her death and even prepared her body for burial. They sent for Peter. We are not told how much time lapsed before he arrived. The best estimate is that Lydda was six to eight miles from Joppa, so the minimum time delay would be the time required for messengers to walk that distance, and for Peter to return with them. At least a few hours would be necessary. The minimum travel time tends to add validity to the record. Tabitha did die, and the Lord did raise her back to life.

Our study verses tell us what Peter did upon his arrival. If Acts is **to** us, if we are commanded—and empowered by the Lord—to follow its examples, I'd like to see a contemporary disciple literally raise someone from the dead who has been declared dead and whose death was witnessed by others.

It was not Peter's power that raised Tabitha, but the Lord's. Peter asked the people to leave the room and immediately prayed. After the prayer, he spoke, "Tabitha, arise." Immediately, Tabitha "opened her eyes: and when she saw Peter, she sat up." Even in the record of Acts, this is an exceptional event. The Lord mercifully revived Tabitha to continue her godly service to His people for a season longer.

We often read brief written accounts of many prayers in Acts. In this passage, we read nothing of the content of Peter's prayer, only that he prayed, and Tabitha arose. The grammatical link between the two sentences strongly leads us to conclude that the two events are connected. Further, that Peter arose from

his prayer and spoke to Tabitha affirms that he prayed for her revival. There can be no serious question. Peter's prayer was related to her arising back to life.

The Lord doesn't impose strict limits on our prayer requests other than things that might conflict with His moral character. If you pray for grace to rob a bank, don't hold your breath waiting for that grace. The Lord will not give it. Scripture dealing with prayer often includes a simple qualifier "**according to His will.**" We are inclined to think of that phrase only in terms of the specific event and the Lord's providence. However, I "Think aloud" with you; God's will is governed by His moral character. In [1Th 4:2-7](#), Paul specifically associates our moral conduct with the will of God. Could it be that "**according to His will**" in terms of prayer relates as well to the **moral quality** of the things we request? This study of prayer has highlighted another significant factor in Bible prayers that the Lord answered. Most of these prayers were specifically for others and intended to honor the Lord. Even when we pray for ourselves—and Scripture does not forbid such prayer—the objective of our prayer should be for the Lord to be honored in His response. Whatever honors the Lord in our lives shall surely bless us. And whatever we request that does not honor Him will not be granted, nor should we want it to be granted in that case. Instead of rejecting the traditional view of "according to His will," I offer the above thoughts in addition to it. Perhaps we would be wise to think of our prayers with both "Filters" in place in our minds as we pray.

A few years back, I read an account of prayer from the old English Puritan era. According to this account, when the Puritan teachers taught people to pray, they would often suggest that their hearers keep a written account of things for which they prayed. They suggest that their readers occasionally review their prayer list and check off the specific requests that were answered. The report indicated that a rather consistent 60-70% of those items were checked as answered. How would you react if you knew that roughly two out of every three requests you gave to the Lord in your prayers would be answered? I'd be ecstatic! And I'd also begin every prayer with a sincere thanksgiving to the Lord for His kind care and love. During the last year of our COVID disruption, I have been blessed often to hear Elder John Wallace Thrower in his streamed preaching on internet. When Brother John makes a clear Biblical point that we need to practice, he will often punctuate his point with "I dare you to try it." Well, in this case of keeping a prayer list, I join him. I dare you to try it. The Lord is good, and He consistently manifests that profound goodness by His care of His people in their seasons of need.

It is not uncommon when talking with people who have experienced answered prayers to learn that the things they requested—and were given—were unusual, not unlike Peter praying on this occasion, and the Lord answering his prayer by raising Tabitha. No, do not expect to pray and see someone arise from the dead. However, I profoundly believe that prayer may prevent death. I believe my wife is alive today because many earnest prayers were offered for her almost fifty years ago. A team of specialists at one of the leading university hospitals in the area agreed on a prognosis of "Metastatic Stage Four." Her cancer never returned!

Take a thoughtful review of your life. Ponder especially those "Surprise" moments when you expected one outcome, not good, and instead your situation turned out great. Could it be that your prayer—or someone else's who was praying for you—was answered? I find nothing in Scripture that affirms a set percent of answers to our prayers, though I find it fascinating that a diverse report of believers from a past era was consistently in the 60-70% range. I do find abundant Scripture to support the premise that I've advocated throughout this series, affirmed by multiple passages throughout the Bible, that the Lord has promised to attentively and graciously respond to His people when they pray sincerely and in faith. In this setting, "Faith" refers to our confidence in the Lord and His kind grace, not to our request. We may immerse our minds in fantasy and attempt to "Sanctify" our imagination by the mere, "I have faith that it will work out well." That mindset is not Biblical faith. It tends more to idolatry, worship of personal opinion, than godly faith. Faith at work means that we follow the Lord's guiding hand in

Scripture and trust Him for the outcome.

How often do you find yourself joyfully surprised that situations turn out better than you expected? Potentially, every one of those events may be the Lord's answer to your prayers, or to prayers of others who care enough to pray for you. This explains why Scripture reminds us that every prayer should include thanksgiving. ([Php 4:6](#), for example)

The question of prayer often (Logically) leads to another question. How frequently does the Lord involve Himself in our lives, either protecting us from ourselves or other unseen (By us) dangers or blessing us with special favors that we tend to take for granted? Scripture answers the question.

For he performeth the thing that is appointed for me: And many such things are with him. ([Job 23:14](#) KJV 1900)

As with New Testament teaching on prayer ([Jas 4:1-3](#), for example), Job leads us to a balanced perspective of Biblical truth. On one extreme view of this question, you have fatalists who believe that God is causative in one way or another for every event that occurs, leading to a wrested belief that He in some way caused sin. On the other side, equally extreme compared to Biblical teaching, you have the aloof stoic view that God involves Himself in nothing whatever that we do. Job distinctly shows us the middle ground between these two unbiblical and warped ideas. He did not say that "**all** such things are with him," the fatalistic idea. Nor did he say that "**no** such things are with him," the stoic idea. However, to our edifying comfort, Job also did not say that "**few** such things are with him," the sad view that unbelief typically adopts. "**Many** such things are with him." In practical terms, the Puritan account of 60-70% of prayer requests being answered agrees with Job's "Many."

While we need to keep God's moral character in mind as we pray and hope our requests are "according to His will," we also need to keep in mind this rich and blessed truth of the Lord's frequent involvement in our lives, always morally, in good ways and never in contradiction to His will that will not tolerate or approve sin, much less cause it. Thus, when we pray, or when we make plans for our future, we should wisely adopt James' words that do affirm the traditional "according to his will" thought.

For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that. ([Jas 4:15](#) KJV 1900)

We might make sincere and honorable plans, but the Lord might have something even more blessed in mind for us instead. Do not forget the practical reality of Job's lesson. "Many" times the Lord does have special blessings in store for us that are far better for us than anything we might ask of Him, or plan for ourselves. We ask with sincere and honest intentions, but He denies because He has something even better for us in a different path.

Absent any Biblical support is the occasional idea you hear that the Lord may effectively play games with you, **randomly** blessing or sending bad things for no reason. In our study of answered prayer, beginning in Genesis, we haven't seen a single example from Scripture of this warped idea, and you will not find such a passage. If we follow the teaching of Scripture, there is always a reason, a reason in our own faith and conduct for the Lord withholding blessings. James makes that point in [Jas 4:1-10](#). I fear that this idea grows out of our not being willing to examine ourselves in light of Biblical teaching, so we presume the Lord's withholding blessings is senseless, instead of finding the reason in ourselves, repenting, and asking His forgiveness. Whenever this idea appears in your thinking, go immediately to this James passage and read it over several times. As you read this passage, underscore in your mind James' careful identity of reasons in our own unbelief and sinful ways that prompt withheld blessings. A good companion passage is [Isa 59:1-2](#) and be sure to read the verses that follow. Our God is a loving, gracious, and, above all, moral Father who always cares and provides for His children, never playing cruel games with them or with their lives.

Elder Joe Holder