

OUR GRACIOUS GOD ANSWERS EVEN WORDLESS PRAYERS

Isaiah 41: 17, 18 –Pastor Richard P. Carlson

Some of you may have read “Evidence That Demands A Verdict,” or its sequel, “More Evidence That Demands A Verdict.” Josh McDowell is an internationally known speaker who travels with Campus Crusade For Christ.” He has written 45+ books. There is perhaps no greater book defending Christianity than Josh’s two books combined into one—“The New Evidence That Demands A Verdict.” The first person this morning who wants to take the time to read this book, may borrow it, if only you will come up right now and receive it. I would like it back, but you may take your time to read it. Here it is!

While Josh McDowell was attending seminary in California, his father went Home to be with the Lord. His mother had died many years earlier, and Josh was not sure of her salvation. He became depressed, now with both his parents gone, thinking that that his mother might be lost. Was she a Christian or not? The thought obsessed him. It seemed to be all he could think about. Josh prayed, "Lord," somehow give me the answer so I can get back to normal. I've just got to know." It seemed like an impossible request. Two days later, Josh drove out to the ocean. He walked to the end of a fishing pier to be alone. There sat an old woman in a lawn chair. She was fishing. They struck up a conversation and she asked Josh, "Where's your home originally?" "Michigan -- Union City," Josh replied. "Nobody's heard of it. I tell people it's a suburb of --" "Battle Creek," interrupted the woman. "I had a cousin from there. Did you know the McDowell family?" Stunned, Josh responded, "Yes, I'm Josh McDowell!" "I can't believe it," said the woman. "I'm a cousin to your mother." "Do you remember anything at all about my mother's spiritual life?" asked Josh. "Why sure -- your mom and I were just girls -- teenagers -- when a tent revival came to town. It was the fourth night -- we both went forward and accepted Christ as our Savior." "Praise God!" shouted Josh, startling the surrounding fishermen.

Beloved, Our gracious God is a God who hears and answers the prayers of His own people, the Bride of Christ. Jesus said in John 14: 14, “If you ask anything in My Name, I will do it.” John adds in I John 5: 14, 15, “And this is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests which we have asked from Him.” In the Old Testament in II Chronicles 7: 14, we read, “If My

people who are called by My name will humble themselves and pray, and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land.” Beloved, it’s not the length of our prayers or the beauty of them or the brevity of them. What matters most is if we are open to the will of God in our lives and in the lives of those we are praying for. It’s easy to pray for our will. It’s difficult to have the courage to say what was once prayed at a meeting of the FCA some years ago, the Fellowship of Christian Athletes. It was at an FCA meeting that Bobby Richardson, former New York Yankee second baseman, offered a prayer that is a classic in brevity and poignancy: "Dear God, “Your will, nothing more, nothing less, nothing else. Amen."

Have you been confused about anything or have you been desperate about something. Would you ever have the courage to pray, “Dear God, “Your will, nothing more, nothing less, nothing else. Amen?” Today, God has led me to a passage tucked away in the Old Testament Gospel of Isaiah. Isaiah the prophet’s book is so full of passages about Jesus coming, his prophetic book is often referred to as the Gospel in the Old Testament. The text today I am preaching from is found in Isaiah 41: 17 and 18. What got my attention this week was a phrase in verse 17 that reads, “I, the Lord, will answer them Myself.” So I went back to look at the question of God’s people that He was answering. What amazed me most was that there was no question that was prayed to the Lord. All that happened is that “The afflicted and needy were seeking water, but there was none, and their tongues were parched with thirst.” Certainly the prayers in their hearts were for water, but they never prayed. All they did was seek water as they were dying of thirst.

Beloved, sometimes we have such heavy burdens and such great needs that we walk around seeking for answers but we don’t even ask God. Sometimes we can’t even find words to express our deepest hearts before the throne of God. We don’t know how to pray. Paul knew about such moments, for he wrote interesting words in Romans 8: 25, 26. “But if we hope for what we do not see, with perseverance we wait eagerly for it. And in the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness: for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words.” In our text today, the Lord assures us as His people that He hears more than our prayers. He even reaches deeper into our lives. He hears and answers our needs before we even ask. He answers our needs according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus. To God, there is a cry to Him in a moan or a groan or a tear or even in our despair. He answers our wordless prayers.

In our text today, there are 5 elements to consider in this answered wordless prayer. As we search the Scripture today, let's go on a treasure hunt to find these five elements, these five clues that help us come to understand why God even answers our wordless prayers: All five of these clues or elements in our text reveal increasingly more and more about our God. First of all,

OUR GOD SEES WHEN OUR SITUATION IS DEEP POVERTY. (I.)

The first few words are in Isaiah 41: 17 are “The afflicted and needy...” Who is God speaking about? The word for afflicted or poor is **aniy**. Aniy in the Hebrew means to be depressed in mind or circumstances, to be looking down in a brow-beaten state, to be afflicted by harsh treatment, abused either physically, sexually, or in sore travail. Genesis 16: 6 speaks using aniy of Sarai, Abram's wife. We read, “So Sarai treated Hagar harshly, and Hagar fled from her presence. Turn to Genesis 16: 7-13. Are you aniy today? I tell you—I promise you. Our God sees. The second word is needy. This Hebrew word is **ebyown**. Ebyown means destitute in feelings physically or spiritually a beggar. Day after day at work, I talk with folk that are unemployed, and destitute in feelings. Some of them come to Jesus. That is the place to start. Paul speaks of people that are ebyown spiritually in Ephesians 2: 12. He takes us back to a time before we were saved. He writes, “Remember that you were at that time without Christ, separate from Him, aliens, separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, strangers from the covenant promises of God, having no hope, and without God in the world.”

The only sinners that God can help are what the Puritans like John Gill called “sensible sinners.” These sensible sinners, by the grace of God, have become aware of their lost and ruined condition before God. When the prodigal son came to himself, he was a sensible sinner. The publican who prayed, “God, be merciful to me, a sinner,” was also a sensible sinner. The Pharisee who prayed thanking God that he was not a great sinner like this publican was just as great a sinner as the publican, but he was not a sensible sinner. He didn't know it. A spiritual beggar in sin who is poor and needy is without merit before God. He knows he has no righteousness and he is destitute for an atonement for him. He is without strength and is helpless and hopeless before God. It's like the old Gospel song, “”Come ye sinners, lost and hopeless, Jesus' blood can set you free. For He saved the worst among you, when He saved a wretch like me. And I know, I surely know, yes, I know, I surely know, Jesus' blood can make the vilest sinner clean.” Repeat. Beloved, those who are afflicted, poor, and needy need not despair any

longer. You will never go away from the door of mercy or the throne of grace empty. Our God sees when our situation is deep poverty. Secondly,

GOD KNOWS ABOUT OUR URGENT NEED. (II.) I read in verse 17, “The afflicted and needy are seeking water...” Beloved, water is an urgent necessity because it is always an immediate necessity. The afflicted, the poor and the needy seek from God an immediate necessity—water and we all need it and need to seek it now. This is more than a traveler seeking money for a bus ticket or food to eat or a night’s lodging. The thing these destitute seekers were looking for was water. Water is supposed to be free. It is a must, vital to live. Spiritual thirst is when we are destitute for what only can be found in the Word of God, and we can’t find the Word. Amos speaks of such a need and such a time of need in Amos 8: 11, 12. He writes, “Behold, days are coming,” declares the Lord God, When I will send a famine on the land, Not a famine for bread or a thirst for water, But rather for hearing the words of the Lord. And people will stagger from sea to sea, and from north even to the east; they will go to and fro to seek the word of the Lord, but they will not find it.”

Jesus knows when we need the water of His cleansing blood, the very water of life. David wrote in Psalm 51: 7, “Purify/Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean. Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.” Sometimes, just like the Kansas wheat of my son in law is crying for rain, Travis has called us to ask us as a church to pray for rain for his winter wheat and for the farmers in South central Kansas who are in a drought and almost ready to lose their crop. Pray for Travis and Amanda Ross. Thirdly,

OUR GOD DISCERNES OUR DISAPPOINTED HOPE. (III.) Look, “The afflicted and needy are seeking water, but there is none...” These people of God in the Old Testament knew where to go for water. They knew where it should be found and where others had found water before, but there was none—deep disappointment. To come thirsty to a well that used to have water, and today, the well is dry. What a picture! Have any of us had disappointed hope with God? I know what it is to know where the answer is to be found, but I have gone there, haven’t you, and come back empty. Every believer who has lived very long in the Christian life has had dry times. We have sought for cool, clear water spiritually, for the answer God tells us is coming, only to find it is still missing. We’ve been to the Word of God, to the throne of grace. We’ve been to the house of God and

worshipped. We have obeyed the promptings of the Lord, as best we can, and still, our cups are dry.

Sometimes, like David, we cry out, as in Psalm 42: 7 that our circumstances are drowning us. David cried, “Deep calls to deep at the sound of Thy waterfalls; All thy breakers and Thy waves have rolled over me. Or we have cried as David cried in Psalm 88: 14, “O Lord, why dost Thou reject my soul? Why doest Thou hide Thy face from me? Fourthly,

GOD SOMETIMES LETS US GET BONE DRY IN OUR PAIN. (IV.) I read in verse 17. “The afflicted and needy are seeking water, but there is none, And their tongue is parched with thirst, or faileth for thirst.” The Hebrew word for faileth or parched is **nawshath**. This Old Testament word is only used 9 times and it means to dry up or to eliminate or to fail. God lets us get desperate for Him at times. For believers, we can cry out for communion with God and sense He is far off, we can beg for a word of wisdom from the Lord and sense the heavens are brass. We can seek for a prompting of the Spirit to be fulfilled, and it seems fruitless to seek any longer. For lost sinners, God allows sinners to become desperate for grace, desperate for pardon from Him, and desperate to be accepted in the beloved, as they have heard it spoken. We sing about these bone dry times. And I, I’m desperate for You, and I, I’m lost without you. Sometimes God allows our need to become so great, so great a thirst for Him that words cannot express our souls. Finally, fifthly, when we think all is gone and God doesn’t care,

GOD THEN POURS OUT HIS ABUNDANT GRACE IN SPRINGS AND RIVERS AND FOUNTAINS AND POOLS OF WATER. (V.)

Notice verse 17b and 18. “I, the Lord, will answer them Myself, As the God of Israel I will not forsake them. I will open rivers on the bare heights, and springs in the midst of the valleys; I will make the wilderness a pool of water, and the dry land fountains of water.” God somehow wants us to seek His face, to call on Him, not to forget He is our only Source. Moses tells us in Deuteronomy 32: 36, “For the Lord will vindicate His people, and will have compassion on His servants; When He sees that their strength is gone, and there is none remaining bond or free.” Notice the verbs—I will answer. I will not forsake. I will open. I will make. The picture that comes to my mind is the picture of the Jews soon. What a terrible dilemma they are in as our commander in chief is calling for them to give back the land to the Palestinians that they won in the 1967 war. Zechariah 12: 10 speaks of a desperate day soon coming when all the Jews will look upon the One whom

they have pierced. Then in the desperation of their mourning, I read in Zechariah 12: 10, “I will pour out on the house of David and Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and supplication and 13: 1, “In that day a fountain will be opened for the house of David for sin and for uncleanness.”

Sometimes God allows us to find how full of grace He is in the valley of conviction or the valley of adversity or in the valley where we are dying of thirst. Just remember, beloved, that if you are in a time of affliction, despair, thirst, or desperation, God is just around the corner and He knows how much we can bear. He is testing our metal. He, like a coach, is bringing us to a stronger place to stand. His call for one more lap is ultimately for our good. The rivers of God’s grace are about to open, the floodgates of His covenantal promises are about to pour out, and the living water from the Lord Jesus is about to fill us to overflowing. Remember, **OUR GOD SEES WHEN OUR SITUATION IS DEEP POVERTY. (I.) GOD KNOWS ABOUT OUR URGENT NEED. (II.) OUR GOD DISCERNS OUR DISAPPOINTED HOPE. (III.) GOD SOMETIMES LETS US GET BONE DRY IN OUR PAIN. (IV.) GOD THEN POURS OUT HIS ABUNDANT GRACE IN SPRINGS AND RIVERS AND FOUNTAINS AND POOLS OF WATER. (V.)** Beloved, repeat Isaiah 41: 17, 18. Amen.