

God's "Response" to Our Prayers – Philippians 4:4-7

I. Introduction:

- A. I thought about starting this message at the same place we've started a dozen others in the last couple years – with Elijah the Prophet.
1. Jezebel threatened the life of Elijah after he had been so blessed by God at the top of Carmel.
 2. He then ran for his life into the desert, eventually asking God to kill him before the wicked queen had a chance to torture him to death.
 3. Put yourself into the shoes of Elijah and then think about our scripture.
 4. *"Rejoice in the Lord always; and again I say, Rejoice."* Even when being hounded and persecuted.
 - a. *"Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand."* The Lord is nearby, Elijah.
 - b. *"Be careful (worry) for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God,"* Elijah is this prayer for death appropriate?
 - c. *"And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus."* Peace was exactly what Elijah needed.
 5. And how about you?
- B. In *1 Kings 19:4*, Elijah prayed to God – to Jehovah – *"It is enough; now, O LORD, take away my life."*
1. I've suffered enough for one life time; I've served you more than most people in this world.
 2. I'm old and I'm tried. It is enough, take away my life from this cruel world.
 3. Elijah prayed, and what was God's answer?

II. God usually answers our prayers in one of three ways.

- A. Sometimes, He says, *"No."*
1. Usually when the Lord doesn't give us what we desire, we say that ***He hasn't answered*** our prayers.
 2. But actually He has; God always has an answer.
 3. But because even we Christians think the world revolves around us, we also think that when God's answer isn't according to our wishes, we think He hasn't really answered at all.
 4. But as I say, the Lord can reply to our requests in one of three ways.
- B. Sometimes there is an immediate *"Yes."*
1. We know it is *"yes,"* because we can see some tangible event or effect related to what we asked of Him.
 2. As we learned last Sunday, Moses prayed to see God's glory, despite not knowing exactly what he asked.
 3. The Lord pointed to a cleft in one of the nearby rocks, Moses stepped in and the Lord passed by.
- C. But sometimes God answers our prayers with a definite *"No."*
1. And I suppose we might say that was God's *"response"* to Elijah's request for death.
 2. I know it could be argued that the man did die, but it was not in any direct answer to his prayer.
- D. Sometimes the Lord grants our request, but ***forces us to wait*** before He does.
1. When God apparently delays His answer, He may be giving us opportunity for growth and faith.
 - a. For example, you are praying for enough money to pay off a serious pending debt of \$10,000.
 - b. You check the mail box the day after your prayer and there is no check for \$10,000.
 - c. But later that day your creditor extends the deadline for repayment, and the next day you are given a gift of a thousand dollars.
 - d. You begin to see that the Lord is both merciful and gracious – kind and beneficent.
 - e. Over the next few weeks God continues to give you a few extra dollars, and you trust Him for more to keep making the payments.
 - f. Ten months later the bill is paid, and your faith in the Lord is stronger than ever before.
 2. You prayed for one thing, and God eventually granted your request, but He also gave you greater patience and faith by making you wait.

3. **Paul** prayed for the removal of his *“thorn in the flesh.”*
 - a. Eventually the Lord said, *“Yes,”* but it took a lifetime.
 - b. And in the mean time, Paul learned that God’s grace was sufficient for him, and his strength was made perfect.
 - c. *“Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.”*

III. Now, what I’d like you to consider is that God seems to base His three *“responses”* on two things.

- A. I know that I’m speaking very anthropomorphically, because God never *“responds”* to anything.
 1. He does not learn things; He does not react to events; prayer doesn’t change God or anything about God.
 2. *“God is not a man that he should lie, neither the son of man that he should repent”* of anything.
 3. With Him there is *“no variableness neither shadow of turning.”*
 4. And, *“your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him”* – **Matthew 6:8**.
- B. Knowing what He knows, and having already determined what He will do, still the Lord, incorporates two things into His *“responses”* to our prayers.
 1. First, He knows the object of our desires. He knows the thing for which we are praying.
 - a. Are you praying for something good or righteous? Is this a foolish request?
 - b. You may not understand the effects of your request, but the Lord does.
 2. We may pray for many things – life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.
 3. Certainly the omnipotent God is not limited in any way, and can said *“yes”* to every request.
 4. Nevertheless, sometimes He says *“no,”* because it is not His will to grant that request.
- C. A second ingredient in every prayer, and something to which the Lord *“pays attention”* – is our **motive**.
 1. It’s not just the thing about which we pray, it’s the reason behind or the attitude behind that prayer which determines how the Lord *“responds.”*
 2. **James** rebukes so many professing Christians with his words in **chapter 4** –
 3. *“From whence come wars and fightings among you? come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members?”*
 - a. *Ye lust, and have not: ye kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain: ye fight and war, yet ye have not, because ye ask not.*
 - b. *Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts.”*
 4. James says, you pray but you don’t receive because you ask amiss – your intentions are sinful – *“that ye may consume it upon your lusts.”*

IV. God *“responds”* to our prayer in four ways based upon these two things.

- A. Sometimes He says *“Yes”* to the **objective** and also *“Yes”* to the **motive**.
 1. Sometimes He says *“Yes”* to the **request**, but in effect He says *“No”* to the **motive**.
 2. Sometimes He says *“No”* to the **petition**, but He blesses in other ways because He appreciates the intention.
 3. And some He says *“No, No.”* It is a serious thing when God says, *“No, no.”*
 4. Let’s consider an example or two of each of these.
- B. In **Exodus 16**, shortly after the exodus, **Israel** started **complaining** about a lack of their customary food.
 1. Their murmuring was, in effect, a sort of prayer, and God replied with a qualified *“Yes.”*
 2. First, the omnipotent God drew **huge flocks of quail** to cover the camp and feed the people.
 3. And then the next morning, the ground was covered in something which became known as *“manna.”*
 4. By **Numbers 11**, a year or so later, Israel had **grown tired of manna** – they wanted **fried quail** again.
 5. This time, God **granted their request** but **condemned the reason** – their **discontent** and **rebellion**.
 6. *“And there went forth a wind from the LORD, and brought quails from the sea, and let them fall by the camp, as it were a day’s journey on this side, and as it were a day’s journey on the other side, round about the camp, and as it were two cubits high upon the face of the earth.”*

- a. *And the people stood up all that day, and all that night, and all the next day, and they gathered the quails: he that gathered least gathered ten homers: and they spread them all abroad for themselves round about the camp.*
- b. *And while the flesh was yet between their teeth, ere it was chewed, the wrath of the LORD was kindled against the people, and the LORD smote the people with a very great plague.”*

7. This was not the kind of “Yes” answer Israel wanted – it was a “Yes” to the request, but also a “No” – condemning their wicked hearts.
8. They got what they wanted, but it was not a true blessing.
9. This kind of “Yes” is good for no one.

C. Sometimes the Lord replies to our prayers by saying “No,” while ***blessing the intention***.

1. I think that we can include at this point Paul’s prayer about his thorn in the flesh.
2. Whatever his thorn might have been – eye sight, back problems, kidney disease, persecution – whatever...
3. Paul was hurting, and he was thinking that he would have been a better servant if the divine Androcles pulled that thorn from his paw.
4. But even in his praying, Paul was ***submissive to God’s will***.
5. His heart was pure, despite the personal nature of the request. *“Thy will be done, Lord.”*
6. And while God left the problem in place, He blessed Paul in other ways.

D. Of course, we, in the weakness of our flesh, think the best of all divine answers is “Yes, Yes.”

1. We think our request is God honoring, and we ask with sincerity and submission.
2. When ***Elijah*** was on the ***plateau of Mt. Carmel***, the whole episode was smothered in prayer and faith.
 - a. He built an altar; he prepared the sacrifice; he had it drenched with water – all in prayer.
 - b. And of course it was also at the command of God.
3. ***I Kings 18:36*** – *“And it came to pass at the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice, that Elijah the prophet came near, and said, LORD God of Abraham, Isaac, and of Israel, let it be known this day that thou art God in Israel, and that I am thy servant, and that I have done all these things at thy word.”*
4. Despite what sounds like a little tinge of personal worthiness, this prayer was about the glory of God.
5. And Jehovah showered down His fiery omnipotence, consuming the water-logged sacrifice.
6. This was a “Yes, Yes” in every possible way.

V. God’s last “response” to our prayers may be “No, No.”

A. By the way, I went to ***Google*** and asked for a ***list of all the prayers in the Bible***.

1. I know I shouldn’t believe everything on the internet, but I didn’t have time to do the research myself.
2. One of the first articles which Google brought up said that there are ***222 prayers*** in the Bible.
3. It then offered a brief description of each prayer and whether or not it was answered.
4. I shouldn’t have been, but I was surprised to see that the vast majority of recorded prayers were answered with some form of “Yes.”
5. But on the other hand, some were clearly “No, No.”

B. For example, in ***Deuteronomy 4*** Moses was speaking to Israel while looking back over the previous months.

1. He said, *“And I commanded Joshua at that time, saying, Thine eyes have seen all that the LORD your God hath done unto these two kings: so shall the LORD do unto all the kingdoms whither thou passest.*
 - a. *Ye shall not fear them: for the LORD your God he shall fight for you.*
 - b. *And I besought the LORD at that time, saying,*
 - c. *O Lord GOD, thou hast begun to shew thy servant thy greatness, and thy mighty hand: for what God is there in heaven or in earth, that can do according to thy works, and according to thy might?*
 - d. *I pray thee, let me go over, and see the good land that is beyond Jordan, that goodly mountain, and Lebanon.*
 - e. *But the LORD was wroth with me for your sakes, and would not hear me: and the LORD said unto me, Let it suffice thee; speak no more unto me of this matter.”*

2. To what was Moses referring?
 - a. It was when he was to bring water to the people of Israel – the second time.
 - b. Unlike the first occasion, this time Moses was to **speak** to the rock from which the water was to come.
 - c. **Numbers 20** – *“And Moses lifted up his hand, and with his rod he **SMOTE** the rock **TWICE**: and the water came out abundantly, and the congregation drank, and their beasts also.*
 - d. *And the LORD spake unto Moses and Aaron, Because ye believed me not, to sanctify me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore ye shall not bring this congregation into the land which I have given them.”*
 3. God rebuked and punished Moses by telling him he would not bring Israel into the Promised Land.
 4. But later Moses begged in prayer to let him cross Jordan, but the Lord reiterated, saying, **“No, No.”**
 5. **“No”** to the request, and **“No”** to the motive, because even in asking, this was selfish and rebellious on Moses’ part.
- C. Another example takes us back to **Elijah’s request for death**, which was almost the opposite to Moses’ request.
1. God said to Elijah, **“No, No.”**
 2. He would not take His prophet’s life, and He certainly didn’t honor the attitude in which the prayer was made.

VI. Conclusion:

- A. Sometimes God says **“Yes”** to the **objective** of our prayer and also **“Yes”** to our **motive**.
 1. Sometimes He says **“Yes”** to the **request**, but judges us in regard to the **motive**.
 2. Sometimes He says **“No”** to the **petition**, but He blesses in other ways recognizing the purity and sincerity of our hearts.
 3. And some He says **“No, No”** to everything about that prayer.
- B. Prayer is one of the most neglected privileges Christians have been given.
 1. We do not pray enough; we do not leave things in God’s hands often enough.
 2. And when we do pray, it is often not with the humble, submissive hearts we ought to have.
 3. Sometimes, unintentionally, *“we ask, and receive not, because we ask amiss, that we may consume it upon your lusts,”* in one fashion or another.
- C. We need to strive to put our selves into a position where God can **“respond”** with a definite **“Yes, Yes.”**
 1. We need to pray humbly, asking God for wisdom in our request.
 2. And we need to be submissive to the extent of rejoicing in whichever way He answers.