

The Wonder of Answered Prayer

Genesis 24:15-26

How do you take on a mission that seems impossible? Answering this question has become the stuff of legends in our popular culture. To take on the impossible, you have to be from another planet, or be bitten by a radioactive insect. You have to be endowed with some hidden strength or super power that enables you to do far more than mere mortal men. Now, of course, everyone knows that this is the realm of fantasy, right? Yet, when we read the Scriptures, we see ordinary men and women accomplishing extraordinary things. And the Bible tells us that this is not the stuff of fantasy, but of faith. And these things were written that we might have hope!ⁱ And to encourage us to rise to our own “Missions: Impossible,” we find appeals that inspire us to pray. The prayer of the righteous is powerful (James 5:16-17), and if we are conscious of our failures, all the better! Why? Because Elijah “**was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain: and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months!**” His story illustrates the wonderful New Testament principle: “**that the excellency of the power may be of God and not of us.**”ⁱⁱ Accomplishing impossible missions is not a fantasy; it is the function of frail human beings who exercise faith in the Living God. In the last message, we raised the question: *What needs to happen that seems to you to be impossible?* Spirit-filled revival? The humble repentance of a rebelling child? A broken and contrite spirit where there is hardness of heart? A remarkable work of God’s providence to deliver you or delight you? These are the kinds of questions that we can bring to Genesis 24 to see the wonder of answered prayer.

By that well in the city of Nahor, the servant humbled his heart to pray. His caravan was loaded with his master’s treasures. Undoubtedly, the arrival of travelers with ten camels caught the attention of the locals. But that servant wasn’t looking for a woman who would be wowed by a display of wealth. He was looking for a humble servant who knew how to work hard and be hospitable. To accomplish his mission, this servant of Abraham prayed to the Lord God of heaven:

- Grant me good success today v. 12
- Show kindness to my master v. 12
- Let it come to pass . . . v. 14
- Let her be the one whom you have appointed, v. 14
- Let me know that you have shown kindness unto my master, v.14

Answered Prayer: “And It Came to Pass!” 15-16

Look at the direct connection. The servant prayed “let it come to pass” (v. 14) . . . “and it came to pass!” (v. 15). Have you experienced the joy of seeing the Lord’s answer to those “let it come to pass” prayers? As we mentioned last week, we have scheduled some fellowship time next week for testimonies about answered prayer. This next week, after our missionary speaks, our Family Fellowship Groups will meet in the afternoon and evening. Would you be willing to encourage others with the answers to prayer you’ve seen in the last couple of weeks? Now let’s be practical on this point: if you have not started a prayer journal (a list of your prayer requests and answers), then it will be difficult to share them (because you may not remember them). It will encourage your heart and the hearts of others to reflect on how God has answered your prayers. If you haven’t started a prayer journal, start one today and be prepared to share God’s praises next Sunday.

❖ **When: Before he had finished speaking!**

Before the servant had finished praying, God answered. It is unclear whether Genesis 24 recorded the essence of his prayer, or the entire prayer. That time of prayer couldn't have been very long, because the women were coming and going around the well. In any case, God's answer came before he finished praying. Isaiah 65:24-25 prophesies that this kind of immediate answer to prayer will be one of the great blessings of the millennium:ⁱⁱⁱ “. . . **before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear.**” What a blessed time that will be! But in Genesis 24, we can already see how God gave glimmers of that blessing. And He is doing the same thing among his people today. In the last message, we noted the ministry of George Mueller; he recorded thousands of prayer requests that were answered the same hour or the same day that he prayed. We labeled these “B.D.I.D.” (Before Day Is Done) answers to prayer. Think of the encouragement you could be to others if you could share some “B.D.I.D.” answers with them.

❖ **Who: The very one whom God had appointed**

Simple prayer does not ignore God's sovereign providence. Prayer makes appeals to God's providence. The servant prayed, “Let her be the one whom you have appointed.” And God did. “. . . **Rebekah came out, who was born to Bethuel, son of Milcah, the wife of Nahor, Abraham's brother . . .**” The Bible also notes that she had her pitcher on her shoulder and that she was good looking. Here is good advice to the young men among us. Look for a spouse who is ready to serve. Praise the Lord for good looks, but dutiful beats beautiful every single time! Remember: beauty is only skin deep; lazy is to the bone; beauty soon may pass away, but lazy holds its own!! But how should we pray this prayer about “the one whom you have appointed?” One way to do this is to look for God's promises and apply them to your specific requests. About George Mueller we read, *“Frequent were the instances of the habit of translating promises into prayers, immediately applying the truth thus unveiled to him. For example, after prolonged meditation over the first verse of Psalm 65, “O Thou that hearest prayer,” he at once asked and recorded certain definite petitions. This writing down specific requests for permanent reference has a blessed influence upon the prayer habit. It assures practical and exact form for our supplications, impresses the mind and memory with what he thus asked of God, and leads naturally to the record of the answers when given, so that we accumulate evidences in our own experience that God is to us personally a prayer-hearing God, whereby unbelief is rebuked and importunity encouraged.*^{iv}

❖ **What: The Lord granted him success and showed His kindness**

The servant knew that God's kindness was the key to success. It is the same for you and me today. We can begin each new day with the simple prayer, “grant me good success today.” And “show me your kindness today.” And when the Lord answers prayer, it gives you assurance of your relationship with Him. It gives you confidence in His presence. Turn over to 1 John 3:19-22. Note the reference to assurance in verse 19. This is the assurance of your personal relationship with the Lord: **“we know that we are of the truth and shall assure our hearts before Him.”** Then, especially when your heart condemns you (v. 21), there is a way to have **“confidence toward God.”** What could give you such assurance and confidence about your personal relationship with God? The answer is found in verse 22: **“And whatsoever we ask, we receive of Him, because we keep His commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in His sight.”** You can have real assurance of your salvation, and confidence in God's presence as you 1.) Obey His commandments, 2.) Seek to do what is pleasing in His sight, 3.) Make prayerful appeals to God and 4.) See that He answers your requests. Again, we can be very practical on this point. Writing down your prayer requests in a prayer journal could help you to test your relationship with the Lord. Are your specific requests being answered? When you see that this is true, you will have greater assurance and confidence.

Do you know for sure that you are a Christian? Would you like to have this assurance? Would you like to enjoy the blessing of a personal relationship with the Lord? Do you believe that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, came to this earth to die for your sins on the cross? Do you believe that God raised Him from the dead just as He had promised? Then, my friend, why not repent of your sins this very moment and place your faith in the God who has promised His blessings? You can know for sure that you are on your way to Heaven, to be with the Father, the Son, and the Spirit forever. And He will assure you of this by answering your prayers.

Understanding Answered Prayer: "And the man wondering at her . . ." 17-25

■ Watching with Eagerness, 17

We will talk about this more in a future message, but this story is full of people making haste. This is a direct result of the fact that they were brimming over with blessings. Here, the servant ran to meet her. He was eagerly anticipating God's answer to his prayer. His persistence sprang from a belief in God's providence. This raises a question about the way we think about our prayer requests. When you pray, do you expect the response of a faithless son or the Sovereign Father? If you had a son who was indifferent to your requests, you know how you would think. Perhaps you would appeal to him repeatedly – even nag him – and he would finally say, "OK, OK, I'll get around to it." But do you believe him? If he has a track record of being unfaithful, you could rightly think, "Yea, I'll believe it when I see it." But that is not the track record of our Sovereign Father; He is not like a faithless son. Our Father makes promises and keeps His promises. He answers the prayers of His children. So if you find that you only halfway believe this, think again. Is the problem with your Father or with your faith? Perhaps we should pray with the man in Mark 9:24, "**Lord, I believe! Help my unbelief!**" Let us learn to watch with eagerness so that we may understand answers to prayer. This eager expectation was evident in George Mueller. *"One morning the plates and cups and bowls on the table were empty. There was no food in the larder, and no money to buy food. The children were standing waiting for their morning meal, when Mueller said, "Children, you know we must be in time for school." Lifting his hand he said, "Dear Father, we thank Thee for what Thou art going to give us to eat." There was a knock on the door. The baker stood there, and said, "Mr. Mueller, I couldn't sleep last night. Somehow I felt you didn't have bread for breakfast and the Lord wanted me to send you some. So I got up at 2 a.m. and baked some fresh bread, and have brought it." Mueller thanked the man. No sooner had this transpired when there was a second knock at the door. It was the milkman. He announced that his milk cart had broken down right in front of the Orphanage, and he would like to give the children his cans of fresh milk so he could empty his wagon and repair it."*^v

In his personal resolutions, Jonathan Edwards once wrote, "Never to count that a prayer, nor to let that pass as a prayer, nor that as a petition of a prayer, which is so made, that I cannot hope that God will answer it; nor that as a confession, which I cannot hope God will accept."^{vi}

■ Wondering at God's Providence, 18-25

The servant had a plan in mind, and He recommended that the Lord would bring his plan to pass; and God let it come to pass, exactly as the servant had requested!

¹⁸ And she said, Drink, my lord: and she hasted, and let down her pitcher upon her hand, and gave him drink. ¹⁹ And when she had done giving him drink, she said, I will draw *water* for thy camels also, until they have done drinking. ²⁰ And she hasted, and emptied her pitcher into the trough, and ran again unto the well to draw *water*, and drew for all his camels. ²¹ And the man wondering at her held his peace, to wit whether the LORD had made his journey prosperous or not. ²² And it came to pass, as the camels had done

drinking, that the man took a golden earring of half a shekel weight, and two bracelets for her hands of ten *shekels* weight of gold; ²³ And said, Whose daughter *art* thou? tell me, I pray thee: is there room *in* thy father's house for us to lodge in? ²⁴ And she said unto him, I *am* the daughter of Bethuel the son of Milcah, which she bare unto Nahor. ²⁵ She said moreover unto him, We have both straw and provender enough, and room to lodge in."

This beautiful woman demonstrated a great work ethic – in answer to the servant's prayer. When we return to this passage, we will study the actual amount of water she had to draw for 10 thirsty camels. She was hospitable to strangers. She went the extra mile to serve others. And the man began to rejoice in his heart that God had indeed answered his prayer. He believed in the God who blesses.

Robert McKee once wrote, "Story is not only our most prolific art form but rivals all activities – work, play, eating, exercise – for our waking hours. We tell and take in stories as much as we sleep – and even then we dream. Why? Why is so much of our life spent inside stories? Because as critic Kenneth Burke tells us stories are equipment for living."^{vii} Genesis 24 is equipment for living. This is the Word of God that gives us the great benefit of being thoroughly furnished to do all good works.

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Discussion Questions:

What has meant the most to you from Genesis 24?

Which promises from God's Word have been very precious to you? How did these benefit you?

Across the years, how have you seen God demonstrate the faithfulness of His promises to you?

How have you seen God answer your prayers recently? How quickly did He answer?

Which prayer requests are you eagerly anticipating an answer to that you could share with the group?

ⁱ Romans 15:4

ⁱⁱ 2 Corinthians 4:7 and following

ⁱⁱⁱ The millennium refers to the coming 1,000 year reign of Jesus Christ upon the earth. As is evident in verse 25, there will be some remarkable changes in nature during this time.

^{iv} <https://www.georgemuller.org/devotional/category/prayer>

^v <https://www.truthfulwords.org/biography/mullertw.html>

^{vi} Jonathan Edwards, "A Young Christian's Directory" (1722-1723), p. 1 accessed at <https://www.bartleby.com/400/prose/288.html>

^{vii} Robert McKee, "Story: Substance Structure, Style and the Principles of Screenwriting," HarperCollins: 1997, p.11