

Are You Ready For Answered Prayer

by R.T. Kendall

This sermon emphasizes the importance of being ready for answered prayer, using the story of Zechariah and Elizabeth from the Gospel of Luke. It highlights two key principles about prayer: that any prayer in God's will will be answered, and the shape of answered prayer is influenced by our readiness at the time. The speaker urges listeners not to give up on their prayers, emphasizing the need to believe and have faith until God's response is clear.

Scripture: 1 John 5:14, Luke 18:1, Romans 8:26, Isaiah 64:1, Psalm 37:4, James 5:16, Luke 1:13, Luke 1:18, Luke 1:64

Topics: "Readiness for Prayer", "Faith in God's Timing"

Description

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Transcript

I want to begin with a question for you. Are you ready for answered prayer? If you have your Bible handy, I want to read from the Gospel of Luke chapter 1. It's about a man by the name of Zechariah. He was not ready for answered prayer.

Here's the way it reads from verse 13, And Zechariah was troubled when he saw him, but the angel said, Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard. What would you think if the angel, Gabriel, came to you and said, Your prayer has been heard? Well, you might say, Well, prayer? What prayer? If you have a prayer list with several things, you might say, Well, what could it be? Or maybe there's something that you want so much. If that was put to you, your prayer has been heard, you would know exactly what it is.

But in the case of Zechariah, he wanted to argue back. He said, Well, prayer? What prayer? Well, said Gabriel, you and your wife, Elizabeth, prayed for a son, and God has heard your prayer. Oh, says Zechariah, that was a long time ago.

That's 20, 25 years ago. There's been some mistake. I'm an old man, and have you had a look at my wife lately? There's something wrong.

Can you think of anything more stupid than to argue with an angel? I would have thought if angel Gabriel came to me and said, Your prayer has been heard, I'd believe him. But Zechariah argued and said, There's got to be some mistake. I want to bring to you two principles about prayer.

Principle number one, any prayer that is prayed in the will of God will be answered. Proof 1 John 5 14, when John said, If we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. Now when you think of the language, he hears us.

And the angel Gabriel said, Your prayer has been heard. Well, this is Hebraic type thinking. It goes to the Hebrew word shamar, that means to hear, but it also means to obey.

And so the idea is, you may have said to your child, Did you hear me? Well, that's the idea of shamar. And if God hears us in this way, it means he will obey our request. So the best thing that you can hear is for God to say, I've heard your prayer.

Well, that's what the angel Gabriel is saying. I've heard your prayer. According to John, if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us.

Now that's a big if. And the truth is, you might pray in the will of God and not know it. Well, that's what happened to Zechariah and Elizabeth.

They didn't know it, but God heard their prayer. Now, in 1 John 5, 14 and 15, you have two ifs. The first if, if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us.

But then there is a second if. And that is, if we know that he hears us, we know that we have our prayer answered. But that's another big if.

One thing, to pray in the will of God. The other, to know that you have just prayed in the will of God. Well, I don't know how often that happens.

If I'm honest, I'm not sure that I've prayed that many times. But as soon as I prayed, I know I've been heard and that I know a prayer will be answered. Or you might say, well, R.T., if you are closer to God, you would know if you're being heard.

Well, I think of the apostle Paul. I don't think he would question his spirituality. He said in Romans 8, 26, that we might pray with groanings and we don't know what to pray for.

Even Paul said that. And so the Holy Spirit prays. This is praying in the spirit.

The good thing is, at least you know as the spirit intercedes, you're praying in the will of God. But you might be praying in the will of God and you're not aware of it. Now, there is a possibility.

If we know that he hears us, I guess that's happened to me a few times. I wish it happened every day. But here's the thing.

It's possible to pray in the will of God and not know it. And that is what happened to Zachariah and Elizabeth. Probably early in their marriage, they prayed for a son and they felt nothing.

What they couldn't have known that the angel said, yes. And in heaven, yes. But they didn't feel anything.

Now, the question is, why is it that we can pray in the will of God and not know that we've prayed in the will of God? Well, I think I know. I think I know why. It's because God likes our company.

And the truth is, if when we pray, we know we've been heard. We might just say, well, thanks a lot, Lord. Goodbye until next time.

And I think one of the reasons that God doesn't answer our prayer is because he wants us to spend time with him. This is why you have in Luke chapter 18. I think maybe my favorite parable is where Jesus gave a parable.

And the purpose was that everybody should pray and not lose heart, not give up. And so he gave this parable of the persistent widow. And it's always given.

And we always read it and think, well, God really wants me to keep on praying. Now, this parable reads by itself. Jesus said in a certain city, there was a judge.

This is Luke chapter 18. A judge who neither feared God nor respected man. And there was a widow in that city who kept coming to him and saying, give me justice against my adversary.

Well, for a while, he refused. But afterward, he said to himself, you know, though I neither fear God nor respect man, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will give her justice so that she will not beat me down by her continual coming. And then Jesus said, listen to this, hear what the Lord said.

And if an unrighteous judge finally will give in, will not God give justice to his elect, his own people who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long over them? I tell you, he will give them justice speedily. And then Jesus added a question. When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth? Now, that last verse probably refers to the second coming of Jesus.

But why would that question be right here? What's the point? The answer is, when God steps in, will you still be believing at the time? And Jesus wants us not to give up. And the question is, will you keep praying? You say, well, I don't know whether I prayed in the will of God. Well, that's because God wants you to keep asking him.

Now, principle number one, any prayer that is prayed in the will of God will be answered. But now come to the second principle. The shape answered prayer takes is determined by our readiness at the time.

Here's the thing. Even though we don't keep believing, it will not abort the answered prayer. You see, here's what happened.

We are told Zachariah did not believe the word from the angel. In fact, the angel Gabriel says, Zachariah, before I go back to heaven, I've got an unpleasant duty to perform. I've come from heaven to give you good news.

Your prayer has been heard, but you don't believe me. And he says, for that reason, you are going to be struck dumb. And you won't be able to talk.

You won't be able to speak because you don't believe what I've just said. Now, what is interesting with some people's theology, they would say if you stop believing, well, that will abort the answered prayer. Wrong.

Even though Zachariah didn't believe, the angel said the prayer will be answered. But here's the thing. The shape answered prayer takes is determined by our readiness at the time.

And so when the day came, the day of visitation, the day God steps in, Zachariah wasn't ready. And this is why I asked the question at the beginning. Are you ready for answered prayer? I'll tell you why I asked that question.

I want you to think back. Things you have asked for maybe a year ago, maybe 20 years ago. And you decided after a while, well, God's not going to answer that prayer.

And you tear up the prayer list. I'll tell you why I gave you this message. I believe there's somebody you have given up that God is going to answer your prayer.

So you just stop praying. Jesus said, don't stop. Just keep on praying.

Because until God says an undoubted no, consider the answer might be yes. Well, in the case of Zachariah and Elizabeth, they tore up that prayer request a long time ago. And now God steps in.

Your prayer has been heard. Your prayer has been heard. And Zachariah doesn't believe it.

The second principle, the shape answered prayer takes is determined by our readiness at the time. You know what should have been Zachariah's finest hour. He always wanted a son.

They had prayed for a son. Now you can imagine there are friends coming to them from all over Judea. Because now Elizabeth is pregnant.

A baby is coming. And they come up and say, Zachariah, we're so happy for you. This is wonderful.

Elizabeth is going to have a baby. And he replies, he's humiliated. He can't enjoy it.

If you had told him years before, Zachariah, can you imagine a scenario that you would be the father of a son and not be the happiest man on the planet? Hold, said Zachariah. If I were to have a son, I would be so happy. There's nothing, nothing that could keep me from enjoying it.

And now it's happened. His prayers answered. And Elizabeth brings forth a baby.

They called his name John. He would be John the Baptist. And then God stepped in.

And when they named him, Zachariah could speak again. But for a while, he was not allowed to enjoy it. Because the shape answered prayer takes is determined by our readiness at the time.

You know, when I think of this account, it takes me right back to my hometown back in Ashland, Kentucky. I can remember as a boy when there was a couple who lived in the south part of Ashland. They felt led to start a new church.

They got another couple to join with them. And they began to pray that God would give them a church. And I remember when their numbers got up to 11 people, they had rented a garage in South Ashland where they had services.

People laughed at them. Did you hear about the group in South Ashland? They had 11 people. But, you know, they prayed that God would give them a building.

Do you know what? Years later, years later, in the south part of Ashland, whenever I go back home, I take my wife, Louise, and I say, there's the church. The most lovely, beautiful church was built that seated between 300 and 400 people. They brought the general superintendent of their denomination in to preach a sermon on the day of dedication.

And the place was packed. I mean, cars up and down the street. You couldn't get in unless you went early.

But the man whose vision it was to start the church had, in the meantime, fallen into sin and bitterness so that on the day of the dedication of the church, he wasn't even welcome. And he knew it. People said they saw him on the day of the dedication with all those people there and all those cars.

They saw him drive by. He looked and just kept on going. His prayer was answered, but the shape it took was determined by his readiness at the time.

Do you know this happened again and again? In the Gospel of Luke, you see this kind of story. Take, for example, when Jesus wept over the city of Jerusalem and said, Your day has come. And he wept.

And he said, All the things that belong to your peace. For example, do you realize that every rabbi in Judea, in Galilee, they would pray from Isaiah 64, verse 1, Oh, the phalanx ran the heavens and he come down. They would pray that.

They would read that week after week. One day God came down and it was Jesus of Nazareth. He was the Son of God, Israel's Messiah.

But the people didn't believe it. God answered their prayer, but they missed entirely. And this is the thing.

Any prayer, pray to the will of God will be answered. The shape it takes is determined by our readiness at the time. I would urge you look back at your old prayer list.

You prayed for healing. You prayed for the salvation of loved ones. You prayed for revival.

Or, you know, it doesn't have to be something spiritual like that. After all, the widow wanted justice against her adversary. It sounds like a selfish request to me.

So he's not saying it's got to be a spiritual prayer like you're praying for revival. Maybe you've prayed for a better job. Maybe you've prayed for a rise in pay.

We could go on. You've prayed for things and you just gave up. I never will forget.

I was preaching in Jerusalem at the Garden Tomb. I think there were 1,500 people there. When I finished preaching, a couple came up to me and said, do you recognize us? I love it when people do that.

I said, well, your face looks familiar. They said, we're from Scotland. And you came to our church and you preached a sermon.

Are you ready for answered prayer? I said, yes, I remember that. They said, you know, we were convicted because we had stopped praying that we could come to the Holy Land. And that night we went back to our prayer list and began praying every day, every day that we could come to Israel.

And here we are in fancy meeting you. You know, that's just like God to do things like that. I was preaching this sermon in Alamorada, Florida.

And there was a couple there, found out later, they'd been praying for a baby. And when I finished the sermon, he looked at his wife and said, I bet you're pregnant. She said, I bet I'm not.

He said, I bet you are. She was. They had a little boy.

They named him Zachariah and they called him Zach. Here's the thing. God cares about you.

Any prayer prayed in the will of God will be answered. The shape it takes is determined by our readiness at the time. This is a serious sermon, but I hope it's an encouraging one.

Go back to that old prayer list and just don't give up. Believe. Until God says no, let the answer maybe yes.

Because Jesus, after giving the parable of this persistent widow, said, when the Son of Man comes, in other words, when God steps in, will he find faith? Will you be believing at the time when God steps in? Heavenly Father, take this word. Apply it by your Holy Spirit. I pray in Jesus' name.

Amen.

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