

# Why was there no Miracle?

## Matthew 13:54–58 (NIV)

Coming to his hometown, he began teaching the people in their synagogue, and they were amazed. “Where did this man get this wisdom and these miraculous powers?” they asked. **55** “Isn’t this the carpenter’s son? Isn’t his mother’s name Mary, and aren’t his brothers James, Joseph, Simon and Judas? **56** Aren’t all his sisters with us? Where then did this man get all these things?” **57** And they took offense at him. But Jesus said to them, “A prophet is not without honor except in his own town and in his own home.” **58** And he did not do many miracles there because of their lack of faith.

**Introduction.** When my father-in-law was living he would often come and visit with us for a week or so at a time. On one of those occasions, he came down with a bad cold. I asked him if I could pray for him. He agreed and I prayed. The next day he went home.

A few months later he was with us again and was not feeling well. So once again I asked if I could pray for him. He replied rather emphatically, “**The last time you prayed for me I thought I was going to die.**” He had gone home and gotten sicker. I jokingly replied, “Well if I had not prayed, you probably would have died.”

Have you experienced this: **sometimes when you pray your prayers are answered, sometimes they are not?** Some who pray and are prayed for are healed, while others are not.

Through my years as a follower of Jesus, I have seen some rather amazing answers to prayers. A couple of months ago at a prayer station during communion, we prayed for a person had a serious chronic medical condition. Several weeks later, this person came to me to share how she had been touched and medical tests had shown significant change. Yet that prayer for my father-in-law was not answered.

Why does God seem to answer some prayers and then not answer others?

### **Is God Capricious?**

When we look at the overall experiences of answered and unanswered prayers, we may wonder, “**Is God capricious?**” Does God choose to answer prayers based on how God is feeling? God’s in a good mood today so it is a great time to pray. God is upset so better wait until tomorrow to pray. Probably few of us imagine God would be so swayed by emotion since the Bible says **God is the same yesterday, today and forever.** In Him there is **no shadow of turning.**

**Maybe God likes some people better than others.** Maybe God likes Pentecostals more so their prayers are more likely to be answered than Methodists. Again, most of us don’t want to believe this and affirm God loves the whole world and know God sends rain on both the just and unjust.

**Is it possible there are things God can’t do, diseases God cannot heal (pancreatic cancer is a biggy) and miracles out of God’s reach?** Well it seems if God can raise Jesus from the dead, God can do the impossible. Jesus said what **is impossible with humans is possible with God** (Luke 18:27). Paul claimed God could do **more than we could ask or imagine** (Ephesians 2:20).

Many among us want a God we can control. **If we follow the right formula by saying the right words, having x amount of faith and carrying out the correct spiritual practices, then we should get the results we long for.** But it seems that **we cannot control God.** God is sovereign and we are human.

I must confess that there are many things I do not understand about God. I often do not know why God acts in particular ways. Often God does not act in the ways I want Him to act. Yet I believe God is God.

### **Is it our Problem?**

**One of the hallmarks of Jesus’ earthly ministry was healing people who were sick.** He healed people from the flu to leprosy. On one occasion he was visiting in his hometown and teaching in the synagogue there. He knew the people and the people knew him. These had been his neighbors and friends. They had attended synagogue together. They had played together as children. I suspect Jesus had a special affinity toward them. Yet something odd happened there. **We are told he was not able to do many miracles there.** Many who were sick remained sick. Matthew attributed to their lack of faith.

So maybe, some our prayers go unanswered have to do with our issues or deficiencies. Let’s look at a few possibilities.

In Isaiah we read these words: ***Surely the arm of the Lord is not too short to save, nor his ear too dull to hear. 2 But your iniquities have separated you from your God*** (59:1–2). **Sometimes**

our sin and failures block the flow of God's grace into our lives. When we fail to forgive others and hold onto bitterness, it limits our experiencing the fullness of God's blessing.

In a section of James where he writes about prayer and healing, he encourages his readers not only to pray for healing with one another but also to confess their sins. He connected healing to being liberated from one's sin.

Whether are praying for God to act in our lives or those we love, it is a good practice for us as in the language of the 12 steps to take a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves. When we find those stubborn areas that plague us, we need to earnestly seek God for help. When a prayer is unanswered, it is good to examine ourselves to see if some barrier is present in us. Of course, we may be in great standing with God and our prayers not answered.

Remember the Apostle Paul. He experienced some type of difficulty which he prayed for God to remove. But God said, "No." There was no indication Paul had some sin in his life. Rather God told him, "God's strength would be made complete in Paul's weakness."

In the letter written by James, he discusses this subject of getting what we ask for from God. He asserts the nature of the problem at times relates to asking. He says, "You have not because you do not ask." Asking is critical. Sometimes we fail to have prayers answered because we don't pray those prayers.

Patty and I have been married for nearly 40 years. During this period of time we have come to know each other rather well. In general, we know what the other desires. Yet, Patty knows if she wants something from me, she needs to ask. I cannot read her mind. Now God can read our minds but asking is a key to faith.

James goes on to assert that sometimes when we ask, we ask wrongly. While I do not fully understand what James is saying, he does indicate our motives are sometimes skewed. He says we ask for stuff to satisfy our own pleasures.

Exploring our motives when asking for God to act can bring an enlightening self-revelation. I must confess that more often than not my motives are mixed. For example, I ask God to fill this place with worshipers. On one hand I want more people to know Christ and experience His amazing love while at the same time be motivated by knowing a full house makes me feel and look successful. Often God answers my prayers even when my motives are less than pure. Sometimes they are not answered when they are rather pure.

Maybe there is another factor of asking that blocks a positive response from God - asking for things which are not his will. So if you ask for something that is not God's will for you, will God give you it to you?

This is a wide open subject and for sure we need to seek God's will and attempt to align our desires with God's (1 John 15:14). But when it comes prayer, it is God's will for us to pray for the sick (James 5:14-16). It is God's desire for us to bring the desires of our hearts before Him (Psalm 37:4). He wants us to express to Him our cares that trouble us (1 Peter 5:7).

At Nazareth, the people lacked faith. Often people are burdened with a message when a prayer is not answered or the miracle does not happen it was because of a lack of faith. It seems many imagine faith to this spiritual substance we can measure and it takes so much to get results from God. If our faith does not measure up, then we will not get the answer. So I guess we are supposed to grit our teeth, strain and believe harder. (That is not the portrait of faith I encounter in scripture.)

In Matthew's telling of the Nazareth story, he says something intriguing which reveals much about the people's situation there. He wrote they were "scandalized" by Jesus. In their hearts was a high level of irritation and cynicism toward Jesus. Perhaps their problem was not the level of faith in what Jesus could do but in their relationship with Jesus.

Jesus said that if anyone had the faith of the size of a mustard seed, that person could command White Oak Mountain to be cast into the sea and it would happen. I think Jesus point was not so much about moving mountains as to say it does not it only takes a minute amount of faith to see God do mighty things. I remember the man who brought his son to Jesus. Jesus

asked him if he believed. His answer was intriguing. *Yes, I believe but help my unbelief. He had mustard size faith* (Mark 9:24).

It seems it takes very little faith to experience God's work. It is God's work after all and not ours. I suspect nearly all of us have mustard size faith.

In praying and asking, the condition of our souls and hearts are important. How we ask is vital. Attempting to discern God's will is extremely important. Having faith is central. But diagnosing why a prayer is not answered as we had hoped according these areas is not always easy. Sometimes these areas may measure up to a good place. I suspect there may be a deeper issue at stake.

### **The Higher Purpose.**

In preparing for this message, I came across an article from an organization for which I have a great deal of respect. In the article about praying and healing, there was a heading of a section which caught my attention: "*Believe in the miracle.*" I immediately thought, "That is not great biblical theology." Since when are we to believe in a miracle? We may want and ask for a miracle in our life or world but our faith is not anchored in the event. If it happens, our faith may be strengthened but the event is not the target of our faith. **We are to believe in God. We are to put our trust in Jesus Christ**

God has a high purpose for our lives- *know Him personally* (Ephesians 1:17). God desire is for us to enter into a *deeper and deeper relationship with Him*. His actions in our lives through God's response to our prayers are designed to accomplish this in our lives.

*God wants us to trust in Him, not in the answer to a particular prayer.* Sure it is good to believe God will give us what we ask for. I encourage you to do that. But greater is the faith that will trust God to do what is best for us and to accomplish His plan.

One of my favorite stories in the Bible is that of the three exiled Hebrews serving in King Nebuchadnezzar's court. He had a huge statue of himself constructed and all the subjects were to kneel and worship it. But Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego refused to do so. They were arrested and brought before the king of Babylon. He interrogated them and asked if they thought their God would deliver them from the punishment he ordered. Their response was classic. *They said: If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to deliver us from it, and he will deliver us from Your Majesty's hand. 18 But even if he does not, we want you to know, Your Majesty, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up"* (Daniel 3:17-18).

This is one of the most amazing statements of faith in the Bible. These guys trusted in God. By faith they knew God was able to deliver them but they also knew He might not do so. But they so trusted God they would remain faithful.

(For Contemporary Only) Recently I have made connection with a new Mercy Me song, Even If. In a few moments you will hear it sung by our band. But before please hear about its background: <http://freeccm.com/2017/02/14/behind-the-song-mercyme-shares-the-heart-behind-their-brand-new-single-even-if/> Play first video on site start around 0:13 – 1:22

### **Response.**

So what do we do? We keep living in Christ. We keep praying. We keep seeking him.

This morning many of you long for God's work in your life, in those you love or the world in which you live. As we sing the final song, you are invited to come to this special place of prayer. If you would like, a team available to join you in prayer.