

Four Keys to Answered Prayers

1 John 3:21-23 (New American Standard Bible)

²¹ *Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God; ²² and whatever we ask, we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do the things that are pleasing in His sight.*

²³ *This is His commandment, that we believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, just as He commanded us.*

Introduction

We are still on the sermon series on prayer. Two weeks ago, we covered the prayers that never reach to God's ears (that is, *prayers offered amiss, prayers offered with sins unrepented, and prayers offered with doubts*). Last Sunday, I talked about the prayers that are unanswered due to *God's will, His providence, and His mysteries*.

Today, we are going to talk about four keys to answered prayers. All these keys are found in today's lesson: 1 John 3:21-23. When we satisfy these conditions, God will hear us, and our prayers will be affirmatively answered. They are *the heart that doesn't condemn us, keeping God's commandments, doing what pleases the Lord, and believing in Jesus and His power*. I hope and pray that after today's sermon, all of us start offering prayers that will be answered by God. Amen.

Content

When it comes down to prayer, Jesus is our role model. Other than one prayer on the night before He was crucified, He has a perfect record. Of course, you may say, *He was the Son of God. He was sinless. God was well pleased with Jesus*. All correct. From His example, I can safely say that today's message is approved by our Lord.

Motive check: Before we go on, I would like to check out our motives. Ask yourself why you want your prayers answered. Is your heart on only getting what you want, therefore, as soon as it is granted, you will drift away from Jesus? Or your true desire is to walk close with Him and therefore all the answered prayers are a byproduct/gift of your intimacy with Him? In other words, all you want is to be close with Him that even though you don't get all the answers to your prayers, you still want to follow Jesus no matter what. Let's make sure the latter is the case. Remember Christianity is a relationship with Jesus. He is not a Genie in the bottle. He is the Lord.

Ok, we are ready to check out the four keys to answered prayers.

Have a Clean Heart (v. 21). John the apostle wrote in verse 21: *If our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God;*

What does it mean ‘*our heart does not condemn us?*’ It means that our conscience is clear. When we thoroughly check out our deeds, words, and thoughts, and if there is nothing that bothers our conscience, we say: our heart doesn’t condemn us.

At times, our heart suffers from Satan’s accusations against us for what we have done wrong. In those times, learn to ask for God’s forgiveness immediately and never yield to Satan’s accusation. The sooner the better.

One piece of information. Sometimes, even though our conscience is clear, the Holy Spirit overrides our conscience. E.g. To get even with our enemies would make us feel so satisfied, yet, the Spirit of God may command us to forgive them. In this case, even though our heart does not condemn us, we must obey the Spirit of God and His voice in us.

When our heart is clear with all these things above, we are ready to bring our requests to God in confidence. Remember clean heart is like a clean cloth on us. It means our sins are forgiven by God. Nothing stands between us and God. It gives us confidence before God as we enter His throne room in prayer.

Keep commandments (v. 22). ²² *and whatever we ask, we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments....*

Verse 22 reminds us again of God’s promise: *whatever we ask, we receive from God the Father*. Last Sunday I said that we receive whatever we ask for in prayer *within God’s will* (Matthew 21:22). Here, it reminds us again of the same promise. *Whatever we ask, we receive from God*. This time, the same promise is conditioned by keeping God’s commandments. Our example is Jesus our Lord. E.g. He says that He never seeks His own will but the will of His Father and does whatever His Father commands Him to do (John 5:30). That’s why God the Father always hears Him and answers Him affirmatively all the time (John 11:41-42), because He always does what is pleasing to the Father (John 5:19).

Same thing goes with us. If we keep God’s commandments faithfully, we know that God will hear us all the time and we will receive whatever we ask from Him in prayer. It is always a good habit to check on this list when we pray: *Have I been keeping His commandments* such as the Ten Commandments and love one another as Christ has loved us unconditionally and sacrificially? If we check it off saying ‘yes,’ then we are one step closer to answered prayers.

Do what pleases the Lord (v. 22). Let me read verse 22 one more time.
²² *and whatever we ask, we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do the things that are pleasing in His sight.*

I looked up in the Bible “things that are pleasing in the sight of the Lord.” For instance, Romans 12:1 says this: *offer your bodies as a living sacrifice that is holy and pleasing to the Lord.* You see, we can use our bodies anyway we want. However, let us give our bodies as an instrument of God’s will that will please the Lord in Heaven. For instance, we can offer our hands to help others instead of hurting them. We can use our tongue to encourage and build up each other rather than tear apart.

You may wonder: keeping God’s commandments and doing what is pleasing to the Lord means the same. You may be right. The way I look at it is this: ‘keeping His commandments’ part is totally dictated by God (we don’t have much room here but obey); for ‘doing what is pleasing to the Lord,’ God gives us freedom to be creative. Can you think of something that you have done that pleased the Lord? For instance, loving your enemies, obeying the voice of the Holy Spirit, bearing the fruit of the Holy Spirit and growing in the knowledge of the Lord (Colossians 1:10), abstaining from sexual immorality (1 Thessalonians 4:1), doing good and sharing (Hebrews 13:16), sharing the gospel with neighbors and friends (1 Corinthians 1:21), faithfully praying daily for God’s Church and His people, even for those who persecute you (Matthew 5:44)? Be creative and make your heavenly Father pleased.

Oh, for your information, here’s the list of things that are displeasing to the Lord: following the sinful desires in you (in the flesh) (Romans 8:7-8, 1 Peter 2:11). Grumbling and complaining (1 Corinthians 10:5). If we do these things, we will displease the Lord that will bring negative answers to our prayers.

Believe (Matthew 21:22). In Matthew 8:13, to the Roman centurion who asked Jesus to heal his servant, Jesus said, “*It shall be done as you have believed*” (Matthew 8:13). His servant was healed because he believed. In Mark 11:23, Jesus commands us to *believe what we say in prayer is going to happen.* Once again, it tells us how important it is to believe what we ask for in prayer to come true. I cannot overemphasize the importance of faith in prayer.

Your unbelief is equally powerful to limit God’s power on your prayer. Last time, I explained to you that doubts can sink your prayers. Same thing happened to Jesus’ power. In His hometown Nazareth, Jesus couldn’t perform any miracle except healing a handful people, because the townsfolk refused to believe in Him (Mark 6:5-6).

There are plenty of examples of prayers and belief. Here’s one more. Whenever He healed the sick, Jesus always asked the individuals if they believed that He could make them whole (Matthew 9:28). Only those who answered ‘yes’ were healed. Once again, listen to Hebrews 11:6: *And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for the one who comes to God must believe that He exists, and that He proves to be One who rewards those who seek Him.* You want your prayers answered? Believe in God, and He will reward you with the answers to your prayers.

Conclusion

When you pray, don't worry too much about whether your prayers will be answered or not. Just believe and pray. And leave the rest to Him. My experience tells me this: as long as we keep Christ's commands and believe in His power, God loves to give what we ask for. Do God's will and commandments. Then, your conscience will be clear, and you will be pleasing the Lord, and whatever you ask for in prayer will be answered.

Amen.